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ABSTRACT

This guide to effective school board service is a "how-to" manual for school board members. The objective of the book is to condense the time board members need to become more effective school leaders, but it also contains information and advice intended to be helpful to experienced board members. Consisting of 17 chapters, the book is based on personal interviews with and surveys of school board members and school administrators. Included are many checklists, helpful hints, and illustrations designed for easy reading and understanding. The 17 chapters discuss getting on board, learning boardsmanship, board meetings, exercising board leadership, the board as decision maker, and boards and superintendents. Also covered are the board and the district staff, school boards and collective bargaining, the fundamentals of school finance, curriculum, and other matters (including transportation, food services, insurance, declining enrollment, use of facilities, and student discipline). The last three chapters discuss communication techniques, politics and the political process, and a board member's personal life (including time management, stress, and the benefits of board membership). (Author/JM)

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A GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE SCHOOL BOARD SERVICE

BECOMING A BETTER BOARD MEMBER

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BECOMING A BETTER BOARD MEMBER

A GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE SCHOOL BOARD SERVICE

A publication of the National School Boards Association
in partnership with
the member state school boards associations

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NSBA
SERVING AMERICAN EDUCATION
THROUGH SCHOOL BOARD LEADERSHIP

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FOREWORD

Leading the nation's public schools has become a complex and demanding job. To be effective, school board members must understand fully their responsibilities and display the knowledge, skills, and courage that are required to meet those responsibilities.

For most of the 95,000 public school board members in the United States, becoming truly effective takes time. A common comment when board members leave school board service is that they were just beginning to feel comfortable and competent in their roles.

The objective of this book is to condense the time board members need to develop confidence and become more effective school leaders. Because a quarter of all board members are new to board service at any given time, it is critical that they develop confidence and board skills as quickly as possible.

This book, however, is not only for new board members. Because so much is happening so fast in school law, personnel, finance, curriculum, community attitudes, and student enrollment, this is a book for the veteran as well as the novice. All school board members must be dedicated to acquiring new knowledge and leadership skills, as well as to honing their understanding of how laymen and professionals can work together. The extensiveness of the useful contents and practical advice embedded in *Becoming a Better Board Member* will be helpful to both new and experienced school board members as they tackle their numerous responsibilities in a changing world.

I view this book as a publishing triumph, not only because it is a unique and vital resource to school board members, but because the way it was created also is exceptional. *Becoming a Better Board Member* is a tribute to the forward-looking NSBA Board of Directors which enthusiastically authorized its creation, and represents a genuine cooperative effort between the National School Boards Association (NSBA) and its active member state school boards associations to meet the emerging and ongoing needs of local school board members. It is the best example of what is possible when NSBA and its members work together to accomplish a common goal.

In preparing *Becoming a Better Board Member* for publication, the authors relied heavily on the members of the project's advisory committee (see page 294), the executive staff members in the state school boards associations and in the associations representing school administrators, local school board members and school administrators, and other educational leaders. These persons gave generously of their time and knowledge, and shared their experiences and concerns in personal interviews, by responding to questionnaires, and by reviewing the drafts of the book manuscript. The authors also drew much information from materials published by various state school boards associations, *The American School Board Journal*, and others.

NSBA might have completed this book in half the time had it not sought extensive advice from school leaders across the United States. We could have called upon a respected educator or education writer to put ideas down on paper. However, we chose a broader based route, and it is because of the extensive involvement of the state school boards associations and others that *Becoming a Better Board Member* is destined for wide acceptance and use.

Although we believe that *Becoming a Better Board Member* is the best book possible, we know also that not all of it is likely to be equally useful to all readers. The editors generally have written with the medium to larger district in mind, knowing that readers from very small districts can use or reject the advice depending on their own circumstances. Differences in urban versus suburban or city versus rural school districts rarely were addressed. Instead, the focus is on what all school districts and boards tend to have in common.

Some readers may want more specific information about certain issues, such as school finance, legal matters, and school transportation. Because of variances in state law and regulations, such issues could be addressed only in general terms. On these and similar matters, readers may turn to their state school boards association for publications and information. (For a complete listing of the state associations, see page 294).

This book does examine issues, such as school board executive sessions, that are common to all boards—even though applicable laws vary from state to state. Consequently, the legality of many of the suggestions offered should be confirmed with your state school boards association and your school attorney. Moreover, information in this book does not necessarily reflect the views of your state school boards association, which should be queried for its positions.

Finally, we note with pride, NSBA's gratitude to Frederick J. Mosher and the Carnegie Corporation of New York for the financial support that helped to make development of *Becoming a Better Board Member* possible.

Very truly yours,

Tom Shannon

Thomas A. Shannon
Executive Director
National School Boards Association
Washington, D.C.

PREFACE

A lot has happened since NSBA Executive Director Thomas A. Shannon and Richard Goodman, the executive secretary for the New Hampshire School Boards Association, put their heads together to think about a book that would be useful to school board members across the United States. That was in 1977—several drafts and book titles ago.

There clearly was a need for a book that would help new board members, especially, to become more effective decision makers and representatives for the public schools. True, there were a number of state school boards associations that had published helpful handbooks and pamphlets for their members. What was lacking, however, was a comprehensive book that examined the general principles of school boardsmanship and related them in a practical manner.

In 1978, with the legwork of Research Director James A. Mecklenburger, NSBA was able to acquire a planning grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York to determine if a book published at the national level would fill a need and, if so, what kind of book it should be. The committee found that a basic primer for new school board members would be most useful, and that the book should not duplicate the kind of information that a state association could or should provide.

Based on the planning committee's findings, Carnegie, in 1979, granted additional funds to NSBA to establish and convene a national advisory committee that would, among other things, see the book through its development. The project advisory committee of 15 included local school board members, executives from state school boards associations, a member of the NSBA Board of Directors, the president of the American Association of School Administrators, and a staff member of both the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. They met three times over a two-year period, conducted additional research, and concluded that the book should be more than a primer.

The Committee selected a personal style and tone for the book, and chose a journalistic approach over a professorial one. That is, the writers were charged with researching how school boards and administrators dealt with each book topic, and presenting their findings, versus any of the writers' own preconceived ideas. The Committee also insisted that the writers avoid using educational jargon, large words, and long, complex sentences as much as possible. The result should be a more pleasurable reading experience for you.

In addition to a committee review, a national review of the proposed contents for the book was conducted in 1979, and then—much later—a force of over 150 school leaders reviewed the draft manuscript. (We are grateful that school board members, school administrators, and others are not the least bit bashful about telling of their personal experiences on and with school boards, and about advising of the merits *and* demerits of the drafts that were prepared.) You'll find what they had to say in quotations throughout the book and incorporated in the book's many checklists.

About the contents

In *Becoming a Better Board Member,* you have most of the information you will need to understand and fulfill your responsibilities as a board member. The book points up the issues about which you should have major concern and provides information you need to help resolve those issues. It will lead you to questions you will need to ask yourself and others before making decisions on school matters. It also will challenge you to examine your attitudes, thoughts, and methods of operation. The many checklists, quizzes, and other devices will help you do this.

We have addressed some concerns in depth, while we have limited the scope of others. For example, we devoted a lot of space to learning boardsmanship, for we believe a good foundation and knowing where to go for assistance is essential. We gave extensive coverage to the mechanics of functioning effectively in the board room, setting goals, making policy, and undertaking board self-evaluation—for these are critical in effective board participation and leadership. We also thought it was important to devote several chapters to the relationship the board has with its superintendent, and to selecting and evaluating the superintendent—for it is through the superintendent that a board will or will not get things accomplished.

On the other hand, topics such as school finance, school curriculum, support programs, and the school district staff were given less attention due to limited space and the array of state laws and regulations and negotiated contracts that can affect these in each state and district. *You should supplement your reading on such topics by reading literature published by your state school boards association and by attending workshops on these.*

Within the book, there are a few references to nationally published or nationally known publications. Few state publications were referenced. However, in our research, we discovered hundreds of excellent books and pamphlets on topics addressed in this book published by state school boards associations and others. Thus, you will surely want to check with your state association to see just what kinds of publications are available.

Terminology

We have tried to employ the terminology that most school board members use. To save space and enhance readability, we've limited the number of terms used to describe one thing. Take the term "school board," for instance. In some states, the governing body for a school district might be called board of trustees, board of education, board of directors, or a school committee. We have used primarily the term "school board."

Also, some readers may take offense that we have used the male pronoun throughout the book. Please don't. We know that almost one-third of all school board members are women and that many school administrators are women. The decision to use he or him instead of he or she and him and her was made solely in the interest of brevity and clarity.

How to use this book

There is no one way to use this book. We've tried to arrange its contents in a logical order but, the truth is, the divisions in the book are somewhat arbitrary. The book could be all one chapter with its numerous subtopics, or the chapters could be thrown up in the air and arranged to suit your fancy. If you are a new board member, you'll probably want to read the first two or three chapters before proceeding to others. If you are a veteran at board service, you might skip Chapters 1 and 2 when you first begin reading the book. However, it is likely that you too will benefit from reading these chapters. They will refresh your memory about the scope of your job and the things you should know. They will show you how to help and deal with a new member of your board. They will show you where to get help, how to best use your personal expertise on the board, how to have effective working relationships with your board colleagues, and much more.

You can read this book from cover to cover, but you don't have to. You will probably want to read it more than once. You can consult it when certain issues arise and you want related questions to think about and actions to take. The book's index will help guide you to all the material provided on each topic.

In addition, you can use the material by yourself, or with others. Many of the topics covered can serve as group discussion starters at board workshops or retreats. There is space to make notes to yourself on many of the book's pages.

We know that regardless of how you use this book, you will benefit from it. You will become a better board member.

Enjoy!

Lu Van Loozen

Luann F. Van Loozen
Editor

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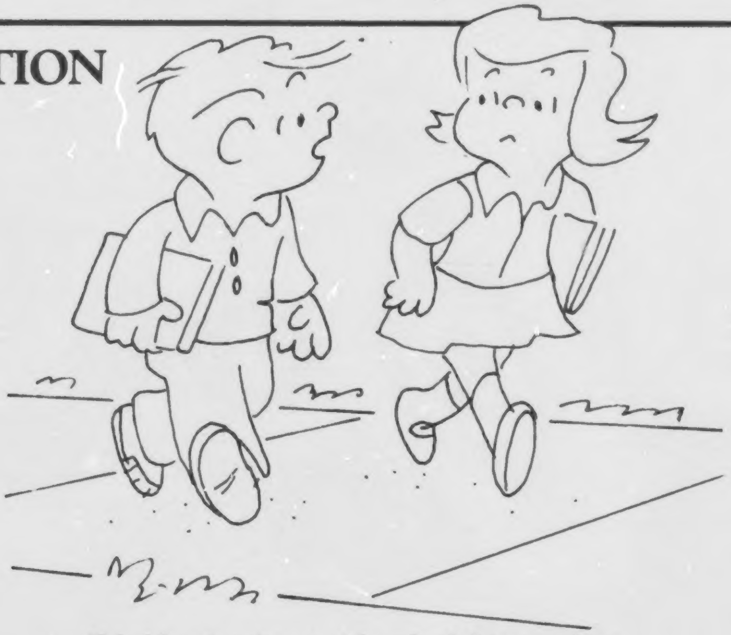
INTRODUCTION



"My Mom is going to night school. It's something called School Board."

8 p.m.

The chairman's gavel falls.

In one community after another across the land, men and women gather around tables, or seat themselves on elevated platforms, to take up the educational problems of their communities. They are known mostly as school boards, but also as boards of education, school committees, school directors, or trustees. Regardless of designation, these men and women are on a mission unique in history and in the countries of the world. They provide an unparalleled example of volunteerism; of the exercise of power by the citizenry; and of the application of lay wisdom to guide one of society's most complex challenges—the education of its young.

Over the span of a year, the nation's school boards will direct the expenditure of more than $85 billion; will oversee a body of teachers, administrators, and non-instructional staff totaling nearly three million people; and discharge responsibilities connected with owning and maintaining school buildings and sites worth about $160 billion. These operations are carried on for one purpose: to educate the nation's 40 million children and youth.

Who are board members? A portrait

Who are these board members and what are they like? They are 95,000 strong and belong to some 16,000 school boards. A generation or two ago, it was as easy to identify them as to characterize them. They belonged to the dominant group of their communities. They were nearly all white, male, Christian, affluent. As late as the 1920s, an observer could visit a hundred school boards in village, town, or city and not see a woman or a non-Caucasian (a term used in those days) serving on a school board. There were exceptions—but they were rare.

Over the years, the exceptions have grown in number. Yet, despite the volcanic changes in our life during the past half century, the portraits of typical school board members have not changed drastically. They still belong, for the most part, to the power structures of their communities. They are still, largely, white, male, of the dominant religions, and affluent.

Let's look at the facts of the national make-up of school boards:

- Ninety percent of the members are white.
- Only four percent are black.
- Two percent are Spanish-American.
- Three percent are of other ethnic groups, including native Americans.
- Men make up 72.5 percent of board membership.
- Some 83 percent of board members are between 36 and 60 years of age—the young have but a weak toehold in the government of schools.

- The annual income of more than a third of board members is $40,000 and over.
- For the most part, the typical board member is a professional, or a business or industrial executive.

Geographic regions bring some variations. On the West Coast and in New England, school boards attract more Spanish-Americans than in other parts of the country. The Southern states account for 12 percent of blacks on school boards. Other characteristics remain stubbornly alike, region by region.

The persistent national facts about board members should not obscure the changes that have occurred, even though they are not preponderant. Rare is the school board that does not have at least one woman, a black, or other ethnic member, and a wage earner with an income less than $20,000. The poor, the minorities, the homemakers, the newly-married, grandfathers, and grandmothers are on deck—producing a variety of voices and interests lacking half a century ago.

School boards: Are they all alike?

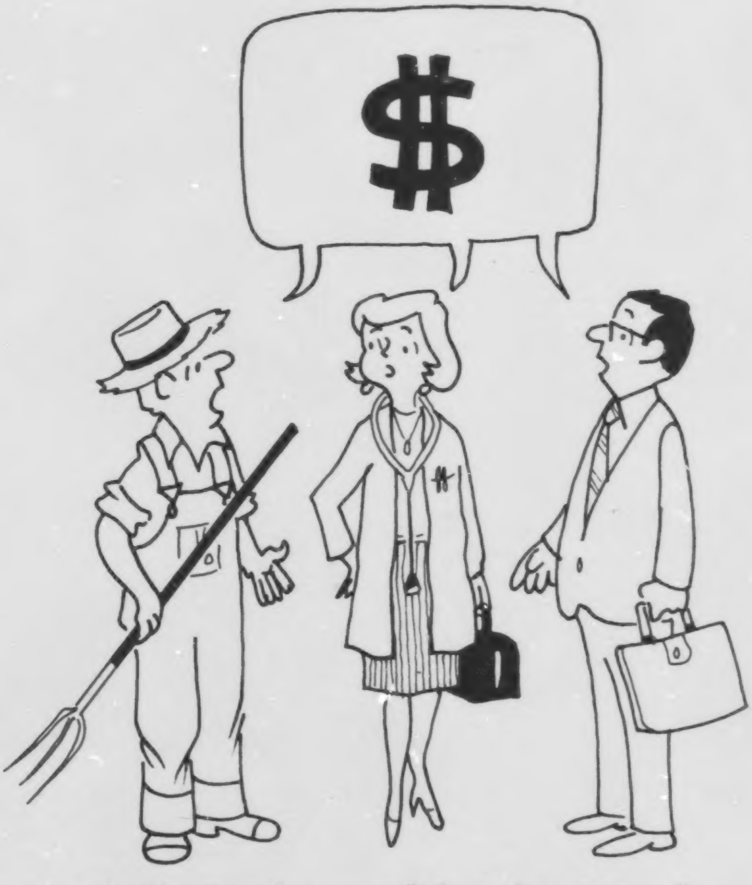
All school boards are alike. *All* school boards are different.

Yes, school boards are *alike* in that they get their power and authority from the state. They are agents of the state. Their lines of legal responsibility go directly to the state. All school boards are governed by state law and must carry out state law.

At the same time, all school boards generate "law" of their own. That is, they establish the policies for governing schools. School boards everywhere are the chief and, if the state permits it, supreme educational authority for the community.

All school boards have identical responsibility: to represent the wishes of the people and to exercise lay control of educational goals and direction. They are alike in still another respect: Boards follow the universal practice and requirement of employing a chief administrative officer, the school superintendent.

"The tie that really binds us into a national family is our common interest in children, in schooling, and in the educational welfare of the community."
—Board member, Connecticut



"As school board members, we really have a lot in common."

Despite commonalities, school boards are as *unlike* as the communities they serve and as the personalities on the board.

Board membership varies from 3 to 15 persons. Some boards are elected; others appointed. Some serve large, urban districts. Most others serve rural, suburban, village, town, and small city districts. Enrollments, budgets, staff, and school plant traverse the gamut of size and complexity—from the one or two-school system, to the huge metropolitan systems of New York and Los Angeles.

There are boards concerned only with elementary education; only with secondary education; or only with vocational and technical programs. Most serve all elementary and secondary schools within a district. Many a school board provide education for pre-kindergartners; for post-high school students (by establishing grades 13 and 14); and for adults (through daytime and evening classes).

The way boards operate is influenced by local tradition, philosophy, and wealth. Some boards are "conservative," a catch-all term which may mean tradition-bound or slow to spend a dollar for anything but which the board considers "basic." Other boards are "liberal," another imprecise description which covers boards supporting change and innovation with dollars. Boards swing from conservative to liberal and back again, or stay somewhere in between—depending on the mood and temper of the community, and on election results.

Some boards are dominated by a strong superintendent. In turn, others may dominate the administration and even hinder its activities—as the rotation of superintendents in many districts shows.

Some boards believe in offering a rich variety of school courses and services; while others will draw the line at state requirements. The district's wealth has much to do with the variety and number of courses offered. Some boards can spend as little as $800 per pupil a year; others can go to $2,500 and higher.

Finally, some boards can set their own tax rate for the schools and draft budgets subject to a few or no controls from other municipal agencies. Other boards lack such fiscal independence and must abide by guidelines and limits set by boards of finance or municipal councils.

Roots and growth of schools, boards

What forces produced the social entities we call school boards—so varied and yet united in one purpose: a good education for every American boy and girl?

The answer lies in our history, our continued thrust for representative government, and in the forces generated by a rapidly growing population living on a vast continent.

From the time the Pilgrims landed in Massachusetts, and for nearly 200 years thereafter, the people in the colonies and in the original states struggled to find ways to provide schooling for their children. It wasn't until the mid-1800s that a national public school system worthy of its name came into being. And it wasn't until just before the Civil War that we finally fashioned, if not perfected, a workable instrument for governing the schools—the school board.

But when—in which decade or, for that matter, in which generation—did the first school board sit down to conduct the first official business for its community?

No historian can answer that question. The spirit of local school control goes back to councils the Angles and the Saxons held in the clearings of their forests, and to the Mayflower Compact of 1620. The roots of local school control by laymen reach back to the town meetings of New England settlements, and to the resolves of the pioneers and householders (whether in Massachusetts or Ohio) to set up a school—they knew if they didn't, no one else would.

We know that among the first concerns of New Englanders (after food, safety, and religion) was to set up a school. For young boys and girls, there were the Dame School, the English writing school, or the school of the three Rs. For older boys (only) who mastered their reading and writing, there came the grammer school and, later, the Latin school. For generations, from 1642 onward, such schools were under control of the people's representatives. Town officials (selectmen) first took on the job of running the schools themselves. Later they named committees to do the job for them.

School committeemen had no easy time. Some colonists neither welcomed the schools nor rushed to their support—despite the laws enacted by the colonies encouraging or compelling school attendance.

Yet, school committeemen carried on with determination. First, they had to locate a place to hold classes. Then, they had to search high and low for an adult who could read and write and who was willing to become schoolmaster. Providing food and lodging for the schoolmaster, and keeping the schoolhouse in repair and heated, were also tasks assigned school committees.

Most important was the school committee role of visitation. Several times a year, committee members visited the schoolmaster and his young scholars to examine copy books, hear the class repeat their letters, and to admonish both teacher and pupils to be faithful to their tasks.

At times, committee members would bring the schoolmaster a new set of quills, ink in the form of powder, and "a little paper." When textbooks came into being (about 1750), the school committee decided which to buy and asked the town to provide the money.

"Examining" the schoolmasters, rewarding the competent and removing the inefficient ones, took much time of the early school committees. So did seeking out parents who failed to send their children to school.

For some 200 years then, school committees (and school boards) carried on roles of administration, supervision, testing, personnel evaluation, textbook adoption, plant maintenance, and community relations—all in embryo stages; and all without administrative help. They achieved their main point, however: to keep the schools close to the people and the people close to the schools. That was the way Americans wanted it.

So valued was the concept of lay school control that it spread from New England across the face of the country. It spawned an ever-growing number of school boards—too many, in fact, and thereby began a new phase of school board development.

When a settlement was small, whether in the East or West, one school and one school board were adequate. As settlements grew into villages, towns, and cities, additional schools were needed, and with each school came a school board. The people insisted on that.

The result was often chaotic. One town or township would often have six or more school boards. Chicago, Buffalo, and Detroit, as examples, educated their children under supervision of a dozen or more boards within each jurisdiction.

They changed and consolidated

Coordination was needed. Too many boards were too much of a good thing. City councils, county governments, and state departments of education began to consolidate the scattered boards within a town or city and placed the schools under one superintendent reporting to one board. The outlines of the present-day school board were at last visible.

The push of the American people toward the Pacific, the closing of the frontier, the growth of cities, the machine age, the explosion of knowledge, the coming of the nuclear era—none of these changed the people's determination to have as much as possible to say about their schools. True, the local school board now had to operate under guidelines set by higher levels of government, the state. Still, each community considered itself unique. Each felt competent to decide how to provide schooling for its children. Such were the forces that created the unique character of every school board.

The future of boards depends on you

During the past four or five decades, prophets have arisen who declared that school boards were not competent to run the schools of a modern, complex society. They predicted the early death of the school board. They argued that public education was so big, so intricate an enterprise, it must be run by specialists and super-managers. They sneered at the ability of ordinary men and women to provide leadership or direction for today's schools.

The prophets come and go, but the school board remains. Even the mind-boggling problems of this century or the next are not likely to push out the school board from the American educational scene.

The school board's survival, however, demands a price. It is an investment by individual board members in new knowledge, sharper leadership skills, and a clearer understanding of local school control and of how laymen and professionals can work together.

This book is designed to help board members in the never-ending process of learning how to become better at what they do.

1

GETTING ON BOARD

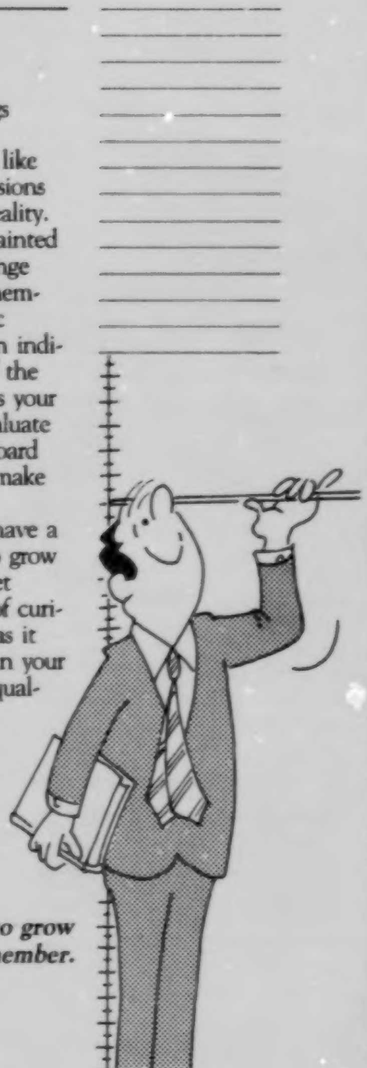
School board service and marriage: They're much alike.

School board service. It's a little like getting married. First you get on the board; then you realize what you have done.

As a candidate for school board service, you allowed yourself to dream about how school board service would be. You probably pictured yourself sitting at the board table, and acting and responding as a board member—much like a bride and groom anticipate how they will be after they join hands. You saw yourself changing the things you thought needed changing. Things would only get better with time.

As a new board member, just like the newlyweds, your innocent visions will need to be tempered with reality. During the honeymoon get-acquainted period, your orientation will change from board candidate to board member; from private citizen to public school official; and from being an individual to becoming a member of the team. Gradually, you will reassess your former thinking and begin to evaluate your successes and failures as a board member. You will need time to make any necessary adjustments.

Most of all, you will need to have a healthy eagerness to learn and to grow as a school board member. To get started, you can adopt a degree of curiosity about school board service as it exists in general and as it exists in your own district. You can study the qualities of effective board members. And you can assess your current knowledge, skills, and traits, and how these might enhance your effectiveness as a board member.



You'll want to grow as a board member.

What you may not know about board service

What you have learned to date can serve as a base for becoming a better board member. But the shoes you have been wearing are not like the shoes you now fill. Old knowledge must be weighed against new knowledge and tempered in light of your new role. Things will look different now as you begin to discover some of the things you don't know about board service.

Although you bring a great deal of personal experience to your new role, you undoubtedly will have some catching up to do. Even if you attended board meetings prior to being seated (few new board members have) and were actively involved in numerous school activities, you need to know a lot more about "schoolboarding."

"No matter how much prior experience a person has in public service or with boardsmanship, when it comes to dealing with school problems, few new board members are ready to go from day one." —Board member, Arizona

The unknown

There are many facts, procedures, and practices which are probably unknown to you at this time. You may not know the other members of your board, their backgrounds, interests, concerns, and hopes, nor the key staff members with whom you will deal. You may know little about the history of your district, about school law in your state, about employee relations or about transportation, food service, personnel administration, and teacher certification.

You may lack information about your state school boards association, the National School Boards Association, and about the complex web of federal, state, and local agencies that influence how schools function. You may not know how difficult it is to influence, in major ways, the operations of a school system. As one Massachusetts board member put it: "Almost every new board member comes in expecting to be able to change a lot of things, full of plans and ideas. The discovery that many of those ideas have already been considered and rejected for valid reasons, and that the board operates under constraints that he, as a member of the public, wasn't aware of, can be a frustrating experience for an eager, new board member."

You also may not know about the language which will be spoken at the board table and the professional educators' shop talk. You'll not know how to cope with the time demands of board service and what this does to your personal and business life.

You may not know what meetings you will attend, or how many, or what will happen there, or what you will have to do at each meeting. You may not have determined what your colleagues on the board expect of you, what staff members expect of you, what local news reporters expect of you, what irate parents expect of you, or even what to expect of yourself. And you may not know how best to cope with all of these expectations.

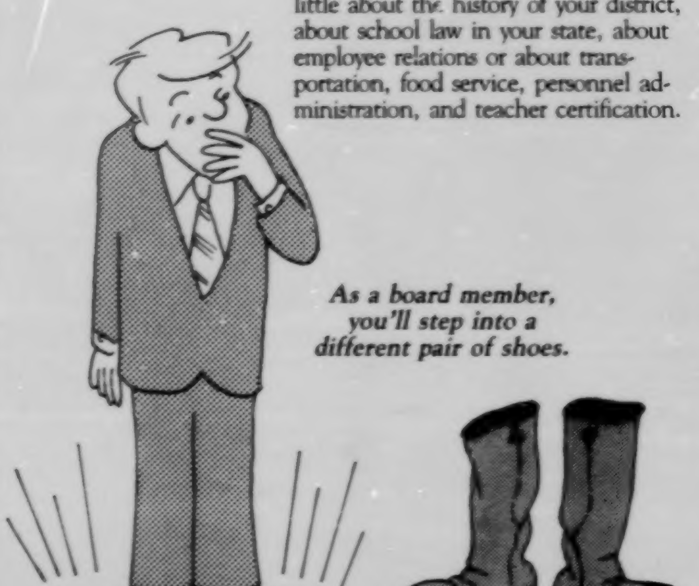
You may not know the skills of group decision making, the patterns of parliamentary procedure as they operate in your district, the procedures for introducing items to the agenda, the

"It's not what I expected. It takes a lot more time than I ever anticipated to deal with the array of concerns the board must handle; such an array I hadn't anticipated either." —Board member, Kansas

IT SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE

Board members admit that the most surprising discoveries about board service are:

- ○ The great amount of time it takes to be an effective board member.
- ○ The tremendous variety of concerns with which the board deals.
- ○ The burden of board-related paperwork.
- ○ The abrupt change from "citizen" status to board member status.
- ○ That the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of the board and administration in operating the school district do not match initial assumptions.



As a board member, you'll step into a different pair of shoes.

functions of committees, the processes for establishing and changing policy, the dynamics of collective bargaining with employee groups, the methods of influencing legislators and other government officials, or about the opportunities you will have to learn many of these things.

You may not know about education of handicapped children, the name of the superintendent's secretary, how to visit a school building, or the effects of board service on your children in school. You probably have little knowledge of the current procedures in your district for evaluating the performance of school principals; and you may not know how much time students in your district devote to taking tests, why they devote this much time to taking tests, who picked the tests, or how the results are used.

There are so many unknowns that your knowledge about many of them can come only with time. Board service is a constant learning experience. Fortunately, as most board members agree, you don't have to become an instant expert in all the areas of boardsmanship. You *do* need to know enough to be able to ask intelligent questions, evaluate the responses you get, answer questions when they arise, and help make board decisions.

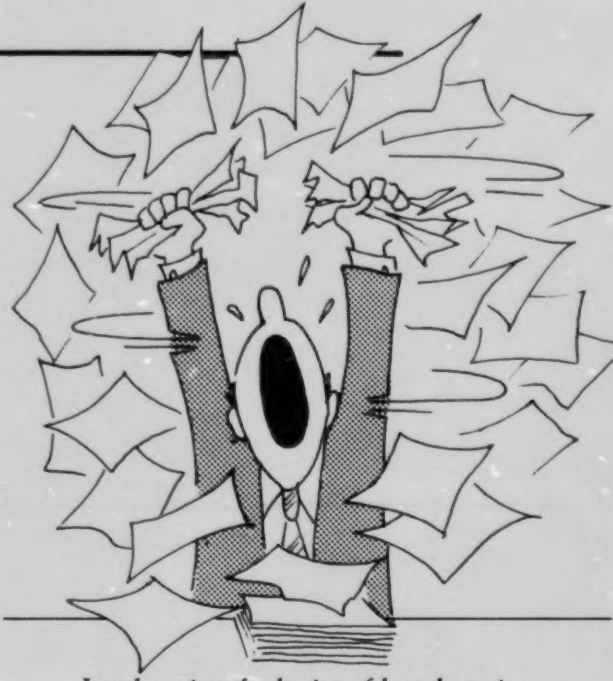
The known

What you need now is the *basics*. You need to begin asking some questions, and you should continue to ask questions as long as you're on the board.

First, get a general picture of your roles and responsibilities as a board member (See page 6). Then, examine the "Questions New Board Members Should Ask" that relate specifically to your local situation.

But *take note: Don't get overwhelmed if a lot of this looks foreign to you, or if there are a number of questions you can't totally answer.* As one board member explained: "Just learning the basics can be a mindbender. When I first started, I felt I needed to learn everything at once. I got so flustered and frustrated, I wanted to quit."

Don't quit. These checklists are provided to help you learn. These are issues you can discuss with board colleagues, the superintendent, your neighbors, school employees, and others who can help you.



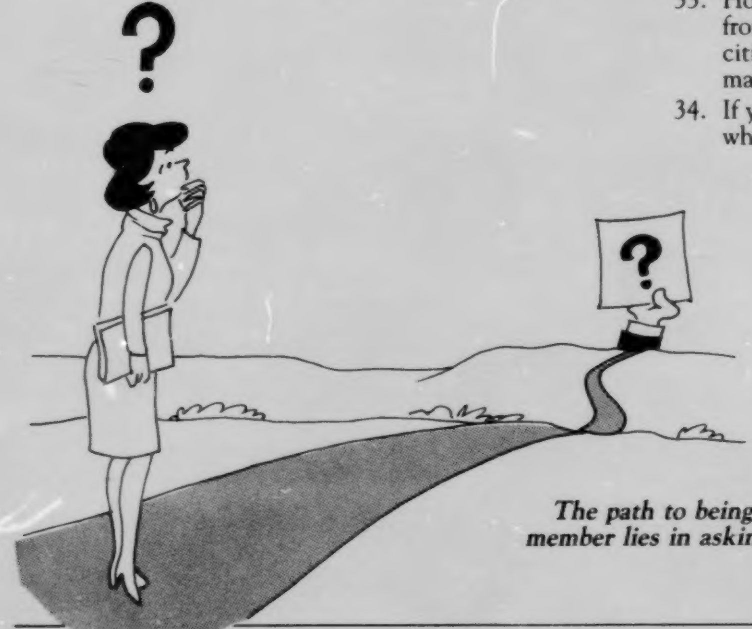
Just learning the basics of board service can be a mindbender.

QUESTIONS NEW BOARD MEMBERS SHOULD ASK

The path to becoming a better board member lies in asking the right questions and being able to interpret the responses and information you receive. The questions below are provided to stimulate your thinking about school board service and your role as a member of the board. If you are a new board member, it is unlikely you will be able to answer all of these questions. You will need to seek out the answers through your board colleagues, your superintendent, and others. It may be an interesting exercise to return to these questions and your answers six months or a year from now to see how your perceptions have changed or how your district has changed. Reading this book should give you new insights to the issues addressed here—insights that may cause you to change some of your answers.

1. What does your board do for your school district? What should your board do that it does not do now?
2. What changes has your district undergone in the past 5 years? 10 years? 20 years? What changes are anticipated in the next 2 years? 5 years? 10 years? What plans are being made to manage these changes?
3. What are your district's major objectives this year? Next year?
4. How does your board go about setting goals and objectives for the district? What planning procedures does it follow?
5. If your district could accomplish one major objective next year, what would *you* want it to be? If the board agrees with you, does it have a plan that would accomplish it? If not, who can help you devise and implement such a plan?

6. What skills and knowledge do you bring to the efforts of your board? What can you do to overcome any deficiencies in skill or lack of knowledge that you may have? Does your district provide for the orientation and development of board members?
7. Has your board taken full advantage of the materials and programs available from your state school boards association? From the National School Boards Association?
8. In the last year, what policies has your board adopted? Why were these adopted?
9. In the last year, has your board rejected a proposed policy? If so, what was the issue? Why was it rejected?
10. When was the last time your board reviewed its policies?
11. In your judgment, should your board give more or less attention to policy making than it does? Why?
12. How does your board know whether its policies are implemented in the schools?
13. What are the ground rules in your district for determining what is "board business" and what is "staff" work?
14. Is your district managed by an administrative team? If so, who's on it? Who controls it? How does it function? How does your board interact with it?
15. How does your board evaluate administrative efforts?
16. How are school programs evaluated?
17. How is legal advice provided to your district? How does your district use this advice?
18. How is the agenda for each board meeting set?
19. Does your board comply with applicable "Sunshine" laws when it addresses matters in its executive sessions? Can the types of concerns discussed legally take place behind closed doors?
20. Can you identify the major state laws that affect the work of your board?
21. Can you list several federal mandates that affect board decisions?
22. How does your board collectively participate in state and national legislative deliberations? What is the relationship of your board to your state school boards association's legislative activities?
23. How does your board participate in budget preparation?
24. Have the district's recent bond issues been successful? Why? Why not?
25. What major budget cuts have been made within the last two years? Why?
26. How does your board participate in setting the salaries of teachers and other school employees?
27. What staff development opportunities are provided to school employees?
28. How does your board influence the school curriculum?
29. What can you do personally to help ensure good working relationships between yourself and other members of your board? The superintendent? Other staff members?
30. Does your board use standing or *ad hoc* committees? If so, what are their responsibilities? What impact do committee recommendations have on board decisions?
31. In what ways does your board communicate with the public? School employees? The press?
32. Does your district have citizen advisory committees? What do they do?
33. How does your board respond to complaints from citizens? What should you do when a citizen complains to you about a school-related matter?
34. If your district engages in collective bargaining, what role does your board play?

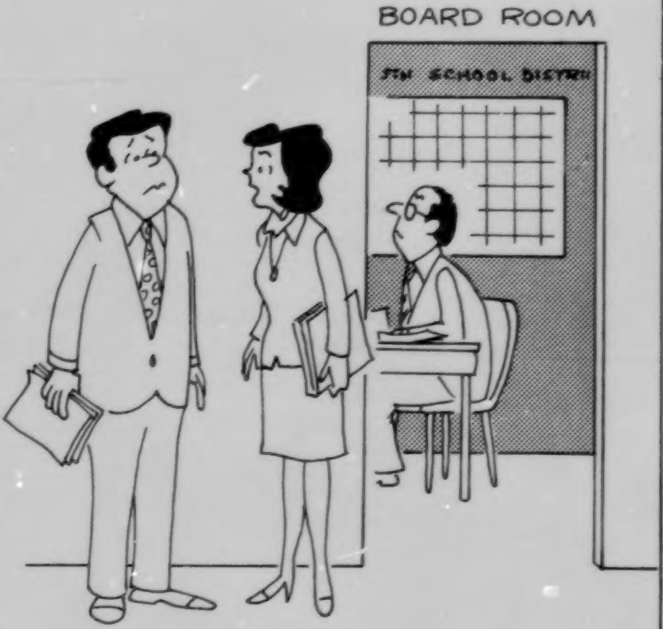


The path to being an effective board member lies in asking the right questions.

THE MOST DIFFICULT THINGS TO LEARN

Experienced board members from across the nation were asked to identify the most difficult lesson or fact they had to learn about board service. Here's what they said most often.

- ○ Determining what your function is on the board and how to accomplish it effectively.
- ○ That no matter what you *think* you know about board service when you first come on board, you still have a lot to learn.
- ○ Learning to publicly acknowledge that you have no power and authority as an individual board member; that only the board as a whole can make policies and decisions for the school district.
- ○ Recognizing the difference between setting policy (the board's job) and administering the schools (the superintendent's job).
- ○ That you must represent *all* the students. Your decisions must be made in the interest of the total school system and not made solely for special groups or interests.
- ○ Learning how to respond to the complaints and concerns of citizens, school administrators, and other staff.
- ○ That change comes slowly.
- ○ That you can't solve everyone's problems by yourself.
- ○ That you must think deeply and sometimes accept a reality that is contrary to your own beliefs.
- ○ That effective boardsmanship means being able to hold the minority viewpoint when voting on a given issue; then openly supporting the majority vote in your community.
- ○ Discovering how the schools are funded.



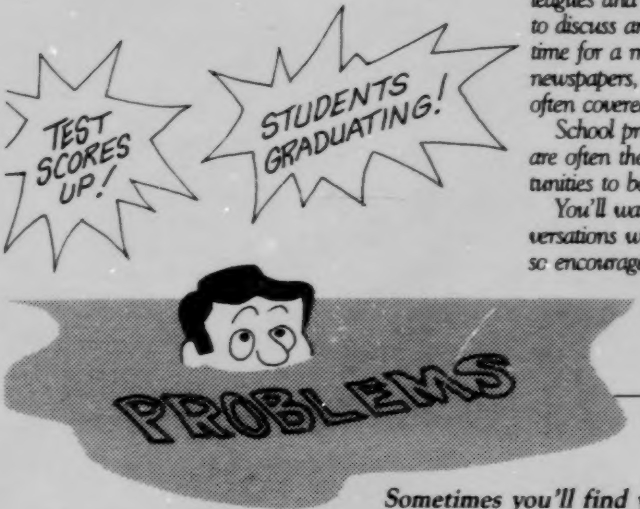
"One of the first lessons a new board member learns is never to giggle while giving a budget report!"

SUGGESTION

While you're learning how to function as a school board member, your board colleagues and others will be eager to tell you their special problems, and not so eager to discuss anything else. Espousing school problems appears to be an honorable pastime for a majority of board members. It's certainly natural. Just as bad news sells newspapers, school system problems usually fill the board's agenda. Good news is often covered in one or two words, such as "just fine" or "all right."

School problems can also serve as energy food for the board member spirit. They are often the reason a person becomes a school board member. They are opportunities to be pondered, shared, explored, managed, and solved.

You'll want to develop a well-balanced picture of reality. So in your conversations with your board colleagues and others, give attention to problems, but also encourage them to discuss the good things about school board service and the schools. Talk about the benefits of board service, such as seeing test scores rise, students graduating, new schools built, and having months of work culminate in a successful new program.


TEST SCORES UP!
STUDENTS GRADUATING!
PROBLEMS

Sometimes you'll find yourself wading to your nose in school problems.

Your roles and responsibilities as a board member

While many important tasks and decisions in every school district are delegated to the superintendent and the district staff, your board is ultimately responsible for all district concerns. Some of these it *cannot* delegate; others it *must* delegate to the school administration.

Your state statutes will define the legal powers and responsibilities of school boards in your state. Your state board of education might assign additional powers to local boards. The powers and duties of school boards are defined somewhat differently in each state. Some statutes are very general, while others are specific. Some outline only what a board "shall" do (mandatory duties), while others include what a board "may" do (discretionary duties). As an individual board member, you have no legal powers. You can exercise your powers as a board member only through board action.

Your responsibilities defined

Basically, the responsibilities of all school boards fall into the following categories:

Policy making. A board's major function is to develop and adopt district policy governing many facets of school operations, including employment of staff personnel, administration of pupil services, educational programs, instructional material, school facilities, equipment, finance, and support services. A board can adopt policy upon the recommendation of the superintendent, but the final decisions on policy cannot be delegated. A board delegates the *implementation* of policies to the superintendent of schools. It evaluates the execution and effect of policy through observations, special oversight studies, and periodic reports by administrative officers.

Designating the chief executive. A board is responsible for recruiting, hiring, and evaluating the performance of the superintendent of schools who will carry out its policy. This task cannot be delegated. Unless otherwise specified in state statutes or board policy, a board exercises daily supervision and control primarily through its chief administrator and does not deal directly with individual staff members employed to assist the superintendent in implementing board directives.

Planning, goal setting, and appraisal. This vital leadership role of a board cannot be delegated. Each board must establish the current and long-range educational plans and programs for its district. It is responsible for obtaining from the administration and other sources reliable information on which to make the best possible decisions about the scope and nature of all school programs. The board is ultimately responsible for appraisal of the results of these programs, a task which is frequently delegated to the administration.

Financial resources. In consultation with the superintendent, a board is responsible for approval and adoption of

SCHOOL
BOARD
POLICY

Making policy is a board's major function.

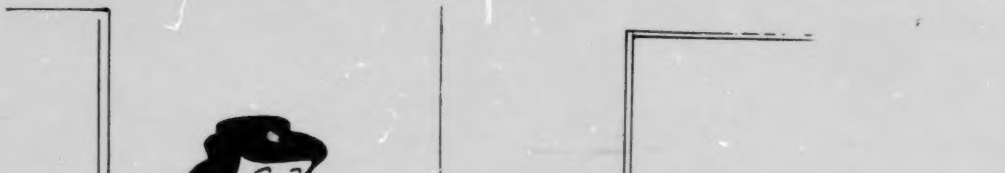
an annual budget that will provide the financial basis for the buildings, furnishings, staff, materials, and equipment needed to carry out educational programs. In most states, other financial responsibilities include:

- ○ Authorizing the administration to make the necessary expenditures budgeted and appropriated by the board.
- ○ Making decisions on the time, size, and sale of bonds and the investment of bond proceeds.
- ○ Adopting policies for the purchase, disposal, and distribution of supplies, property, and equipment.
- ○ Approving and adopting an insurance program for the district.
- ○ Authorizing the administration to invest and borrow funds within the limitations of state law.

Staffing and appraisal. In most districts, the board delegates the tasks of recruiting, hiring, evaluating, promoting, and disciplining staff (in accordance with board policy) to the superintendent. The board is responsible for establishing policy governing salaries and salary schedules, terms and conditions of employment, fringe benefits, leave, and in-service training. The board must ratify all collective bargaining contracts.

Instruction. Working closely with the school administration, a board must set general goals and adopt policies upon which instructional programs will be based, all of which must be in accordance with state law and regulations promulgated by the state department of education. A board has the power to accept, modify, or reject its superintendent's recommendations on the scope and nature of educational offerings, as well as on which textbooks will be used.

School facilities. A board is responsible for determining school housing needs; communicating those needs to the community; purchasing, disposing of, or leasing school sites; and for approving building plans that will support and enhance educational programs. Upon the recommendation of the superintendent, a board will employ architects, hire building contractors, and contract for operational and maintenance services.



"Our architect has come up with a design for an innovative, open space building that even our most tradition-minded critics would like."

Students. Although the board does not deal directly with students and solve student-related problems, it does set policies which guide the actions of administration and other school staff. A board can accept, modify, or reject policies recommended by the superintendent regarding school admissions, placement, promotion, attendance, expulsion, suspension, graduation, conduct, discipline, safety, health services, food services, and transportation services. All such policies must be viewed in light of their effect on all students' equal access to educational opportunities in accordance with state and federal guidelines.

Public relations. To be an effective board member, you will want to maintain ongoing personal communication with school staff, students, and members of the community. Your board must see to it that there are adequate and direct means for keeping the local citizenry informed and for keeping itself informed about the wishes of the public. All formal means of district communication (surveys, newsletters, and the like) should be established in board policy and delegated to the administration.

Adjudication and investigation. From time to time, a board may have to hear appeals from school staff members or students on issues which involve board policy implementation. It may also conduct legislative oversight hearings and investigations on board policy implemention issues and school system operations.

General. Other board activities include:

- Establishing procedures for the operation of the board.
- Electing board officers.
- Approving the annual school calendar.
- Hiring board staff assistants.
- Determining who will be on the district negotiating team (if there is one) and employing a chief negotiator for collective bargaining.
- Establishing attendance zones for the school district.
- Retaining an attorney or law firm for the school district.
- Setting strategy and coordinating litigation decisions when the school district is involved in a lawsuit.
- Establishing and maintaining effective board-superintendent relations.
- Periodically reviewing and evaluating board operations and performance.
- Working with (as well as authorizing the administration to work with) city, county, and other government and non-government officials and agencies.

Ethics for effective board members

Ethics. Effectiveness. These are two different things, but they go hand-in-hand. Your ethics form the basis for the code by which you conduct yourself. If your actions are guided by a sound, ethical code of conduct, chances are good that you will be effective as a board member. You will be capable of producing results.

Begin with a commitment

A sound code of conduct for school board members begins with a genuine commitment to striving for high quality public education that supports the full development of all children, and the present and future welfare of their local community and country. You must be committed to doing this, and you must be committed to working effectively with others to do this.

Don't forget the work ethic

Saying you're committed to serving public education and your district's percentage of the nation's school children isn't enough. You've got to *do* something about your commitment. You've got to work for what you believe in. This means:

- Doing your homework before board meetings.
- Keeping abreast of current educational issues within your own school system, throughout the state, and across the nation.
- Making every attempt to attend all board meetings.

"I think my commitment manifests itself in how much work I do, which in turn determines how effective I am and how effective I can help the board to be."
—Board member, Kansas

- Becoming well versed in parliamentary procedure.
- Learning how to get and present facts, not merely interpretations of them.
- Devoting sufficient time, thought, and study to proposed actions.
- Considering alternative solutions to problems.
- Encouraging ideas and opinions from students, staff, and citizens of the district, and endeavoring to incorporate their views in your deliberations and decisions.
- Working with the rest of your board to establish effective board policies by which the superintendent can administer the schools.
- Establishing fair and equitable terms and conditions of employment and evaluation for all school employees.
- Selecting sound instructional strategies and materials, and submitting them to regular and impartial evaluations.

"Making an individual decision before you consider all the facts at a board meeting, and confirming this decision with others before a total board decision is made, is unethical."
—Board member, Montana

Adopt these principles

No code, of course, is complete without the more orthodox ethics such as honesty, trust, fairness, and integrity. Not using your office for personal or partisan gain, or for the benefit of your family, friends, church, or special interest groups is another standard which should be a part of your operating code.

COMMITMENT

You say you're committed to providing a quality education for the kids in your schools? Then roll up those sleeves.

Recognizing the limits of your authority as a board member is vital. As one board member said: "You must remember at all times that individual board members have no authority apart from the official actions of the board, and you should conduct your relationships with the school staff, the local citizenry, and all media on the basis of this fact. Making promises to citizens that you don't have the authority to make is unethical."

The following are some standards that experienced board members agree are key elements of effective board service:

- Base your decisions on the available facts and your independent judgment, and refuse to surrender that judgment to individuals or special interest groups.
- Take no private action that will compromise the school system, the board, or the administration, and avoid being placed in a position of conflict of interest.
- Support and protect the civil and human rights of all members of the school community.
- Respect the confidentiality of information that is privileged.
- Keep an open mind so that you can accept and evaluate new concepts.
- Listen objectively to constructive criticism.
- Know the difference between personal influence and factual persuasion.
- Maintain a sense of humor.
- Learn and practice the art of compromise.
- Don't avoid confrontation merely to improve your chances for reelection.
- Share the responsibility for all board decisions, regardless of how you voted.
- Strive for teamwork.
- Do not undermine the authority of the superintendent or intrude into the spheres of responsibility that properly belong to the school administration.

"I try never to put the board or the administration in a compromising position by speaking for them."
—Board member, Illinois

SUGGESTION

If your school district's written policies don't include a code of conduct for board members, check with your state school boards association or the National School Boards Association for guidance in developing one.

Evaluate the impact of your skills and personal traits

It's no secret: Most board members feel good about themselves. They are competent and, consequently, have had many successes...and they plan to have many more. Few, however, have taken the time to analyze why they are successful.

Each board member has good traits like being intelligent, being young and full of vigor, or being older and wiser. But a board member does not always assess these attributes in light of how to use them to influence what a board does; nor is it common to take a close look at those characteristics which might not be working in one's favor and those which are inhibiting effectiveness.

If you can realistically evaluate your skills and personal traits, you will be in a better position to minimize your weaknesses and utilize your strengths. This can add up to your being a more effective board member.

Open your eyes. Take a look at yourself by examining the following list of personal traits. Check those items which you feel apply to you, and think about how each will affect your ability to serve on your board. Will it be positive or negative? Maybe you can revive some dormant traits which are positive. There may be some negative features that can be rectified. Focus on your strengths and apply them to your board service.

Check the statements which best describe you.

What effect will this trait have on your being an effective board member?

(check one)

	Positive	*Negative*
I enjoy working with people.	☐	☐
I can get more things done by myself.	☐	☐
I learn quickly.	☐	☐
I'm a good judge of people.	☐	☐
I have a good sense of humor.	☐	☐
I think positively.	☐	☐
I plan actions in advance.	☐	☐
I tend to procrastinate a lot.	☐	☐
I wear my feelings on my sleeve.	☐	☐
I talk more than I listen.	☐	☐
I can't take criticism.	☐	☐
I'm sensitive to the needs and concerns of others.	☐	☐
I have a great deal of self-confidence.	☐	☐
I make fast decisions.	☐	☐
I am physically fit.	☐	☐
My family and personal life is on the rocks.	☐	☐
I can keep confidences well.	☐	☐
My ego requires a lot of attention.	☐	☐
I speak well in public.	☐	☐

(check one)

	Positive	*Negative*
I have to know all the facts and weigh all sides of an issue before I can make a decision.	☐	☐
I'm well informed about public education today.	☐	☐
I can change my mind on issues.	☐	☐
I am a good leader.	☐	☐
I am a good follower.	☐	☐
I enjoy dealing with numbers, math, and budgets.	☐	☐
I often get overwhelmed by complex problems and details.	☐	☐
I manage my time well.	☐	☐
I'm a good organizer.	☐	☐
I'm too trusting of others.	☐	☐
I don't believe enough in the capabilities of others.	☐	☐
I'm easily provoked.	☐	☐
I have high expectations.	☐	☐
I can debate issues without arguing.	☐	☐
I'm a good brainstormer, creative.	☐	☐
I feel comfortable with change.	☐	☐
People often take advantage of me.	☐	☐
I am in control of my life.	☐	☐

"As a school board member, I was so busy trying to save the school system, I forgot about me!"

2

LEARNING BOARDSMANSHIP

Take time to learn the ropes.

The skills and experiences you have before you take office certainly help prepare you for your new role and ease your transition into it. As one board veteran said: "Board members should keep in mind that they bring valuable skills and talents to the board. They possess some degree of common sense and good judgment. They usually know how to work with people and lead them to decisions. This is the basic equipment a person needs to function as an effective board member."

Does this mean that you can relax about your learning as a board member? Can you trust that your knowledge and skills are sufficient to meet the demands of board service?

Of course not. Your responses to the quizzes in Chapter 1 may have already indicated areas where improvement is needed.

The character of board service is continually changing. Your board will change. Your district will change. It takes constant effort to keep abreast of the newest public attitudes, the latest court decisions, the newest managerial approaches, and the latest innovations in teaching and technology that affect your schools. You must learn the ropes and then keep on climbing.

"Election to board office doesn't mean instant boardsmanship.... Even the board member who has been on the board for a number of years cannot just sit back and say he no longer needs to learn."
—State association executive, Michigan

This should motivate you

If you need a push to aggressively pursue your orientation and development (training) as a board member, think about the following:

○ Without some pre-service or orientation program, it is estimated that it

"During those first few months at the board table, I was worse off than an untrained army recruit sent straight to the front lines of battle. Why? Because I lacked the necessary training. I should have been sent first to some sort of boot camp for new school board members." —Board member, New Jersey

will take six to 12 months of on-the-job experience before you can really function effectively.

- The national average tenure for school board membership is 2.8 years, which means that 25 to 30 percent of all board members at any given time are new to board service. Think about the impact on the education of the nation's children if all new board members took one year or more to become effective in their roles!
- What you know about organizational management may differ from how your district runs its business. The greater the difference between your managerial and organizational experience and the management and nature of your district, the more you need orientation.
- Education is different from any other business or governmental service in any community, and it's big business. A school district often employs more people, serves more meals, maintains more buildings and grounds, transports more people over more miles, and has a larger budget than any other business in a community.
- Ninety to 95 percent of most board members say they need more training to become more effective in tackling school district problems. Are you vastly different from most board members?

"All of our constituents have experienced and survived the educational process in some form. This makes the demand for our education into board matters all the more important." —Board member, Virginia

How board members learn

"The biggest surprise upon becoming a board member is the amount of work it takes to be a good one." —Board member, Alaska

How do most school board members learn to be better board members? They learn on their own and by the seat of their pants. They learn with others, *sometimes* in a formal workshop setting. To a lesser degree, they rely upon reading books, magazines, and newsletters.

If you are like many board members, you will begin the learning process through informal conversations with your board president, other board members, the superintendent, and district staff. Your state school boards association, the state department of education, local citizens who possess needed expertise and information, the staff of your intermediate or regional district or service center, or college and university professors can be valuable outside resources. On occasion, you might seek assistance from the staff of the National School Boards Association (NSBA) or from superintendents and staff from nearby districts.

A 1980 survey conducted by NSBA indicated the top five items that board members felt contributed most to their development of boardsmanship:

- Conversations with school superintendents.
- Personal and professional experience.
- Experiences as a parent of school children.
- Attending NSBA's national convention.
- Attending the workshops of state school boards associations.

The NSBA researchers also asked board members to name the *two* avenues they would pursue in order to learn about a subject. The respondents overwhelmingly preferred a visit to a school or other site where the topic is handled effectively. Their second choice was to attend a two-hour lecture provided by an "expert."

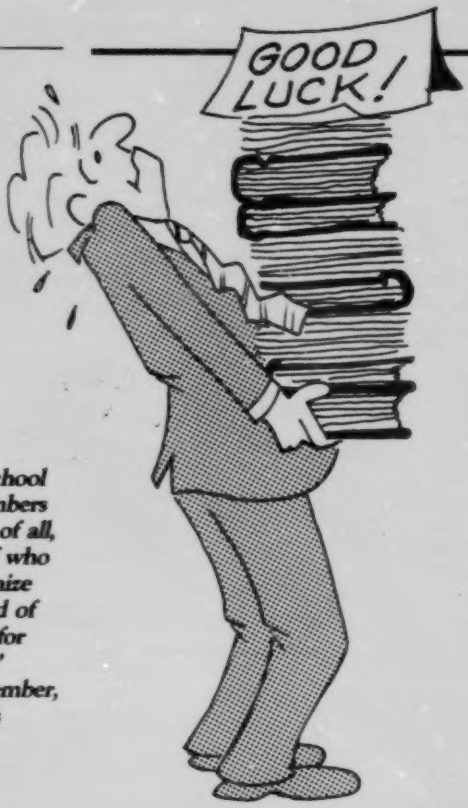
Developing as a group member

You must work closely with the other members of your board if your board is to improve as a group.

One way board members are doing this today is through board self-evaluation. They evaluate their own efforts and often seek evaluation from their superintendents, other administrative staff members, outside consultants, and from the news media and community groups. Effective evaluations pinpoint weaknesses which can be strengthened by training.

Another development activity which has proven beneficial to boards is the board "retreat." Board members, superintendents and, sometimes, their staff members "get away" for several days of intensive learning and a "meeting of the minds."

"Board members want training that is highly task oriented, takes a short period of time, is done in small groups, and that is led by competent instructors." —NSBA research



You need more than a stack full of district documents and a nod from well wishers.

No method is magic

Certainly, there is no one best way when it comes to orientation and development for school board members. The degree to which a school district provides for school board member orientation and training ranges from next to nothing to an all-out effort.

Too often, a district's method of orientation includes handing new board members the board policy manual, a copy of school regulations, and maybe minutes from past board meetings. As one board veteran observed: "That's not orientation."

In some districts, however, the board has a policy on board member orientation and development and provides funds for training activities, such as attending workshops, conducting evaluations, and visiting other school districts. Some large districts have a staff resource person to assist the board.

If you find your district's policies on board orientation insufficient, you can supplement them with your own schemes and schedules for orientation. Later you can encourage establishment of a development program that meets the unique needs of your board.

"I think school board members need, most of all, a paid staff who can organize some kind of training for them."
—Board member, Illinois

"The goal of board member training is not necessarily to teach new board members all the answers, but to train them to ask the right kinds of questions."
—Trainer, California

"No person can absorb all the complexities of board membership at once. They all do it at their own rate. If you really want to help and support a new board member, you won't try to force feed him if he isn't ready or able to handle it."
—Board member, Ohio

WAYS TO LEARN AND GROW

- ○ Annual board self-evaluations.
- ○ Board "retreats" or workshops.
- ○ Visiting schools.
- ○ Staff "briefings" on education programs and activities.
- ○ Using consultants to advise the board.
- ○ Simulated exercises designed to increase understanding of board process and educational issues.
- ○ Attending state school boards association and NSBA conventions and workshops.

What you need to know

"Tell me what I need to know to be an effective board member."

This is a common request many new board members make of board colleagues, superintendents, and others whom they believe know the answer. They hope there exists a single body of knowledge that will provide instant boardsmanship. Unfortunately, as one Iowa school leader put it, "There is no single body of knowledge that will make a person an effective board member, just as there is no single curriculum that will meet the needs of all public school students in all schools in this country." However, the things you *should* know fall into two categories: content and process.

Content

The content area represents all the resources and information you and your board colleagues will need to make decisions, and includes information that pertains specifically to your district, as well as to rules and regulations made outside your district that affect all schools, including your own.

You will need to know about your board policies, master contracts, curriculum offerings, graduation standards, student discipline, evaluation criteria, district budget, and much more. In addition to the many laws and regulations emanating from federal and state governments, you'll also need to become familiar with court decisions, commission rulings, and department of education regulations.

Undoubtedly, it is the content category that takes the most time and causes board members the most headaches. Acquiring needed information may seem like a never-ending homework assignment, but it is an important assignment. Everything you do as a board is affected by rules, regulations, laws, court decisions, and board policies. You will find yourself relying heavily upon both school administrators and your school attorney to keep you informed and advised.

"Individual board members cannot be experts in school law, school budgets, affirmative action guidelines, and make decisions on the spot during board meetings using their own mental recall. The administration needs to provide them with this information."
—State association executive, Iowa

Process

The process category relates to the skills you will need as a board member, including:

- Ability to assemble and evaluate information.
- Communication skills.
- Representation skills.
- Policy and decision-making skills.
- Ability to use and retain the board's authority.
- Ability to work with other board members, the superintendent, and other school staff.
- Organizational skills.
- Ability to effectively use human and material resources.
- Political skills.

Trying to acquire all the information you'll need to make decisions can make your head hurt.

- Ability to function in small and large meetings.
- Ability to perform under pressure and to deal with conflict.

You probably have already developed skills in many of these areas, but have room for development in other areas. More than likely, you were elected or appointed because you could communicate well with various constituencies. But no matter how finely tuned your skills are in any given area, you will need to test them as a board member with your own board. How your board operates, both as individual board members and as a group, will influence how you use or adapt the skills you have, and what new skills you will need to learn.

"What's important is what you do with what you see and hear."
—Board member, Indiana

A MODEL ORIENTATION PACKAGE
or
'ALL YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW...'

This list of orientation and reference materials should be available to board members. The most important items (marked with an asterisk) might be collected in a manual or loose-leaf package for present and future board members.

School-Community Relationships and General Responsibilities

*1. A personal copy of written board policies and administrative rules of the district.
2. Minutes from the past year's board meetings (perhaps synopsized).
*3. An explanation of school board organization (officers, standing and *ad hoc* committees, if any, and so forth).
4. A list of board member development opportunities throughout the year.
*5. An explanation of how board meetings are conducted, including parliamentary procedures.
*6. An explanation of the authority and responsibilities of the board, superintendent, administrators, and individual board members.
7. An explanation of how the chain of command works within the district.
8. An explanation of programs, activities, and interests of education-oriented groups and associations.

9. An explanation of the district's public relations program, how it is coordinated, and what activities regularly take place.

School Finance

*10. A copy of the district's budget. Explanation of how, when, and by whom it is prepared; how educational needs are translated into a dollars-and-cents plan, where the money goes, how the money is spent.

11. An explanation of your state's financial plan and what it means in terms of the local district budget.

12. Data on district per pupil cost and expenditures at both the elementary and secondary level.

13. An explanation of the assessed valuation and tax structure of the district.

*14. An explanation of the funding process for the school district.

15. A description of the district's student enrollment trends and projections.

16. Data on the existing bond indebtedness of the district and when various building debts will expire.

17. Information on federal aid to your district's education program.

School Curriculum and Instruction

*18. A copy of the school district's written statement of educational philosophy.

19. A copy of the district's latest short and long-range goals, along with the latest needs assessment results.

*20. An explanation of curriculum standards required by state law and implemented by rules of the state department of education.

21. Copies of recent evaluations from the state department of education or regional accrediting agencies.

22. An explanation of the district's overall curriculum program.

You'll need to get your hands on the right information.

23. An explanation of the educational organization of the school district, including student groupings, departmentalization, team teaching, and shared pupils/teachers.

24. An explanation of how elementary and secondary curricula are coordinated.

25. Student drop-out statistics.

26. Information on standardized testing, recent test results, and the utilization of test results.

27. Data on the percentages of students who go on to college or other post high school programs.

28. Documents showing teacher-pupil ratio and median class size for the district and for appropriate sub-groupings.

29. An explanation of the district's program for exceptional children: those with higher or lower than normal mentality, impaired sight or hearing, and emotional, neurological, and other problems.

30. Data on the age and condition of textbooks and school equipment.

31. A description of libraries and instructional material centers in use now or planned for the future.

32. A statement of the board's philosophy regarding extra and co-curricular activities in the district.

Administration and Staff

33. A copy of job descriptions of the superintendent, board secretary, treasurer, and top administrators.

*34. An organization chart of the school district's management structure.

35. An explanation of recruitment procedures.

36. A copy of staff salary schedules and fringe benefit programs, including data on average and median salaries of teachers and school administrators.

37. Data on staff-administrator ratios.

*38. A copy of the district's collective bargaining agreement(s), if any, and a brief history of recent collective bargaining activities in the district.

39. An explanation of the district's evaluation criteria and procedures for administrators, teachers, and support staff.

40. An explanation of the district's orientation program for new teachers.

41. An explanation of the district's staff development program.

School District Facilities

*42. A list showing the number, location, and condition of schools and other buildings owned or operated by the district.

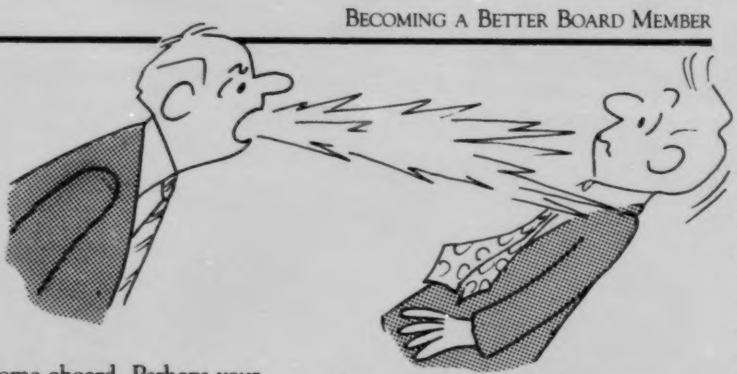
43. An explanation of construction projects contemplated and in process.

44. A description of the district's building maintenance program.

45. An explanation of the student transportation system.

46. A description of the geographic limits and attendance zones of the school district.

Self orientation



If you came on board wanting to fire the superintendent or some other school employee, hold up! Orient yourself to board service before taking another step.

"Readiness is a vital factor in learning. I don't care if you're talking about first graders or school board members. No one is going to learn anything unless a state of readiness to learn exists."
—Board member, Ohio

You've just come aboard. Perhaps your first priority is firing the head coach or you think that the district is wasting money, and you have vowed to cut the budget by 15 percent. Like many new board members, you have a basic knowledge of the problems facing your school district, and you are eager to correct these problems.

The orientation task before you will be easier if you take it one step at a time and remember that orientation is an ongoing process. The following is a list of the things you can do to speed your learning.

- If your district has an orientation program, take full advantage of it. If your district doesn't have a program, let the superintendent know you are interested in such a program.
- Attend some of the workshops and training sessions provided by the state and national school boards associations.
- Attend all board meetings that take place between the time you are elected or appointed, and the time you take office.
- Request that your superintendent arrange for you to have a complete tour of school facilities.
- Ask to be introduced to key school administrators and staff.
- Ask to visit classes of varying grade and ability levels to get a sense of the different needs and student-teacher relationships in the classroom.
- If the superintendent arranges meetings with key staff responsible for administering board policies, ask them to explain the administrative chain of command, important projects they have ongoing, and what the history of these activities has been.
- Ask to see a resource file of publications (and have your name placed on the distribution list), including copies of current newspaper articles pertaining to your board. Reading professional publications and educational periodicals will give you an idea of the larger educational community within which you function.
- Don't get bogged down in paper work. Skim documents with an eye for the most important points. Before you read a long document, look at the headings and read the first and last paragraphs, which usually introduce and summarize the contents.
- Chat informally with your new board colleagues in order to learn about their concerns and interests.
- Familiarize yourself with board policies to get a feel for the many details of school operations. Find out how the policy manual is developed, used, reviewed, and updated.
- Use the minutes and agendas of past board meetings to learn about the kinds of issues that have come before the board. The minutes can reveal how often the board deals with curriculum, the budget, or school personnel, and clue you in on the kinds of issues you can expect to confront. You may also be able to determine who voted for what, what issues and recommendations have passed and failed, and how well the board works as a team.
- Volunteer to participate in one or two board study committees. Don't volunteer for committees on topics about which you are already expert. You'll learn more by tackling a topic unfamiliar to you.
- Be careful not to overload yourself with too many responsibilities at one time.
- You don't have a lot of time to waste attending workshops and seminars that teach you nothing new. Know what information you want and the specific skills you want to gain.

"Start out by listening, reading, and by asking questions. This is a great way to let people know you have a mind, a voice, and a degree of interest without making yourself look foolish because of a lack of experience or information."
—Board member, South Carolina

"If there's one advantage to being a rookie, it's that you can ask the simplest questions without feeling too much embarrassment."
—Board member, New Mexico

Programs, organizations, and people who can help you

"The training of a board member depends on whom that board member trusts."
—State association executive, Iowa

Your board president and other board members, your superintendent, your state school boards association, and the National School Boards Association will be your primary sources for help in improving your knowledge and skills as a board member. Institutions of higher learning and state education departments also can be helpful resources.

Your board colleagues

As you begin board service, your board colleagues can be a principle source of information, encouragement, and guidance. "Experienced board members should assist, advise, develop, trust, and accept new board members," is the credo of one board president. But how eager they are to do this may depend on their personalities, their expectations of you, the issues they're currently involved in, and whether you ask for their help. As one Iowa state association leader explained: "Some incumbent board members may wait to be asked. They don't want to force their opinions on the new person; they respect that person's right to develop his or her own pattern." So *ask* if you want help.

"Most board members are willing to help new board members. They feel a responsibility to the new member."
—Board member, Pennsylvania

Experienced board members may fear that you will turn out to be concerned only with your own ideas and priorities and not be a contributing member of the school board "team." Most of these hold-over board members believe that it's to their benefit to have you as a working member of the team, so, you can reasonably expect them to be sincere about helping you. Don't be surprised, though, if some of them choose not to help you at all. Some may actually be antagonistic. For instance, if you campaigned against issues that they have supported, in their eyes, you've already placed yourself in opposition to them.

You may have to remind veteran members that you are new, that you need to have things repeated, and that you may need more background information than they do about certain issues. They probably will be much more tolerant of your inexperience than you are, *if you openly express a desire for their help.*

"You'll be spending a lot of time with the other board members. Since you're essentially stuck with one another, it's really to your benefit to be friendly from the outset. You can disagree with their philosophies without being disagreeable."
—Board member, Montana

Your superintendent

Your school superintendent may be one of your best allies in getting acclimated to your board. Of course, if you campaigned to get rid of the superintendent, his natural instincts may make him reluctant to give you a helping hand.

Under normal circumstances, you can expect your superintendent to:

○ Discuss the district's orientation and development program for school board members.

If you came on board with an axe to grind, your board colleagues might not be too inclined to help you.

SHOULD YOU GO TO WORKSHOPS IF YOUR CONSTITUENTS OBJECT?

Try to avoid being pressured not to attend workshops and meetings that will help you become a better board member.

Some board members do not attend workshops and conventions sponsored by their school boards associations and others even when they really want to go. The problem is often cost. They are pressured from all sides to cut their board operating budget just as the rest of the school budget is cut.

You can learn a lot about board service *without* going to these meetings, but most board veterans agree with the Illinois board member who said: "There's no way a board can do everything on its own without outside advice. Nor should it. If it does, it is acting foolishly."

There are many arguments you can make regarding why you should attend a meeting. You can argue about the benefits of having informed board members who know what they are doing. You can argue that your major responsibilities as a board member are complex and that you have to stay abreast of the latest laws and regulations. After you attend a meeting, you can tell how what you have learned could be applied to your district. When appropriate, call everyone's attention to something you learned at one of these meetings which pays off in savings for the district. Ask those who object if they would send their children to a school run by untrained teachers, or to a doctor who learned his skills only from medical journals or by talking to other local physicians.

In the name of accountability, you may want to voice these arguments, but don't expect to quiet the "vocal few." According to one board member: "You can't reason with some people. They think that conventions are a waste of the taxpayers' money, and they want the board to do everything by itself. If you think that attending a meeting will help you and your district, you should go. If you don't go, you will not be as effective as you could be."

"Some new board members resent the fact that we know more," complained one board veteran. "First they clam up, and then they do all they can to sabotage our decisions."
—Board member, Nevada

- Provide you materials and information about the school district.
- Discuss items that need explanation, or have the school administrator responsible for a program explain it to you.
- Review the duties and responsibilities of the superintendent and other members of the administrative staff.
- Take time to discuss his educational philosophy with you.
- Personally take you on a tour of school buildings to acquaint you with the district's facilities and their condition.

When getting help from your superintendent (or anyone for that matter), there are two things you'll want to avoid:

- Don't allow yourself to become overburdened with so much paper that you will be discouraged from going through it and understanding it.
- Be sure your superintendent doesn't just talk about the "good" or "positive" things about the district. Ask him about the problems the district is having and the proposed solutions being considered.

Your associations

Most school boards belong to a state school boards association which represents and serves their interests. Through their state association membership, they belong indirectly to the National School Boards Association (NSBA). Some boards also participate in NSBA through its Direct Affiliate Program.

Educating school board members is a primary concern of these associations. State associations and NSBA hold annual conventions and publish materials that address topics of vital interest to board members. Many of the state associations also provide an orientation workshop where you can learn about the state laws and current issues that affect school board decision making, the services provided by the association, where to get help with your questions, and more. Sometimes, new and experienced school superintendents participate in these workshops, which enables both the new board members and the new superintendents to better understand each other's roles, responsibilities, and problems. Often, the association will provide you with an orientation manual which focuses on facts about school law, school finance, education philosophy and concerns, and board responsibility in your state.

Either by telephone or written correspondence, the state association can provide detailed answers to your questions about school management and board responsibilities.

You'll want to ask your superintendent or board president what relationship your district has with the state and national associations, and whether your board is active in their activities.

Others who can help

Workshops and conferences for school board members are being increasingly sponsored by colleges and universities. Some post-secondary institutions tailor their programs to meet local needs or offer classes that may be of interest and benefit to you.

When you're trying to learn, you can also turn to the state department of education or its regional service centers. Through its research division, through dissemination of rulings and opinions, through the workshops it sponsors, and by answering specific questions, this state agency can be very helpful.

Survival tips for the single-issue candidate

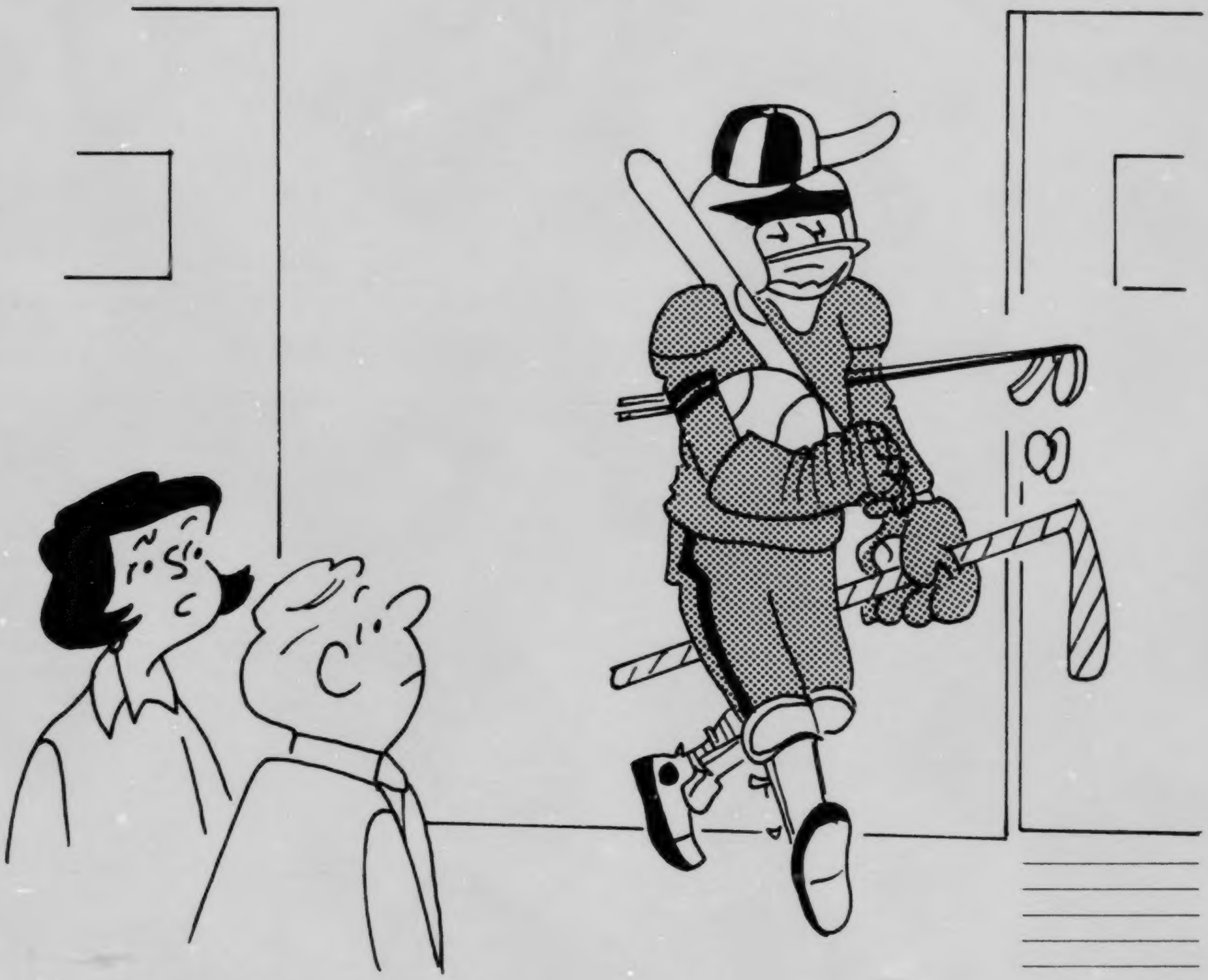
Were you a "single-issue" candidate? In your campaign rhetoric, did you identify one or two school matters that you would correct when elected? Perhaps you had, as many others have had, specific interests or hopes about what you would accomplish when you got on the board.

If so, you probably feel pressured or impatient to tackle these problems. You may also be suffering from tunnel vision. Thinking about *your* concerns may be keeping you from concentrating on *all* issues that come, before the board. As a single-issue board member, you're distracted, and you're likely to be distracting other members of your board from making decisions.

You need to avoid letting personal or single issues dominate your thinking and actions. At the same time, you might need to save face with your supporters. Here are some tips on what to do from a 19-year Ohio school board veteran, and several others.

- Don't voice your concerns at your first board meeting. Your new colleagues more than likely know what's on your mind. Your willingness to wait, listen, and adjust to your board responsibilities will be looked upon favorably. When you do speak, you will have won the respect you will need to be heard.
- After you've attended several board meetings, bring your concern to the board. This should be done during a regular board meeting when there is a period of open discussion, or when suggestions are being made for new business for another meeting. You might say, "I have this concern on my mind, and I would like time on the next agenda to discuss it."
- Limit yourself to one or two concerns. A laundry list of proposals will be difficult for the superintendent and your colleagues to properly study, and will dilute the important points you wish to make.
- When expressing your concerns, acknowledge that you may not have all the information you need to make a recommendation to the board. Ask the superintendent to supplement the discussion with background material, facts, and figures on the issue that might influence your thinking one way or the other.
- You should bring any concerns that deal with personnel matters or other sensitive issues directly to the board president or superintendent. Ask for background information on the issue, and about the possible consequences of bringing it before the board and public.

"One board member is just one vote. Any board action depends on a majority of the board. One person, alone, can accomplish nothing."
—Board member, Georgia



"He's a single-issue member."

- ○ Try to be as objective as possible when studying any information provided to you.
- ○ Base any recommendations you make on what will be good for the entire district, not on what will be good for you, your political interests, or the special interests of your campaign supporters.
- ○ Discuss your findings and conclusions with your new board colleagues, the superintendent, and with your supporters.

In following these steps, you will have acted as a responsible member of a board. You will have used the proper procedures to let the rest of the board know where you're coming from, and you will have found out where they stand. You will have cleared the air and your head, and you will be better able to listen to the rest of the board. You will be able to make informed recommendations and decisions.

If the outcome is opposite of what you promised the groups that backed you, you will be able to tell them why you changed your mind, and why you think they should change theirs. In any event, you will have kept your promise. You will have tried. You will have acted credibly. There is no more that anyone can ask.

Using your personal expertise

Do you find that your ears perk up every time a question is raised that relates to your craft or profession? Are you expected to give your opinion and advice when this happens? Does the administration expect you to do some of the research or homework on matters related to your vocational knowledge and skills? Is this taking a lot of your time? Do you sometimes feel others on your board resent your having "all the answers" on particular issues? Have you given quick "expert" responses during board meetings which led your colleagues to make decisions they later regretted?

If so, your personal expertise is being abused by yourself and others; and you should put a stop to it.

Perhaps you touted your individual expertise when you ran for the board. Many board candidates do. Those who elected or appointed you may have done so because they thought having a person with your skills or background would benefit the board and the district. You may feel obliged to use your expertise "for the good of the district." If you are a lawyer, for instance, you may be asked to give a legal opinion on a contract. If you are an electrician, the administration may ask you to check out the electrical work performed by the contractor the district hired.

If you are in business, your board colleagues who view a multi-million dollar budget as something foreign and ominous will tend to lean on you—like calculus students rely on their calculators—to help them make sense of the district's revenues and expenses. If you are an educator, you can define educational terms when they stump the board. If you are a rancher, you might be asked to discuss your views of the district's 4-H program. Whatever your profession, the smaller your district, the more frequent these requests might be. There are never enough dollars, consultants, experts, and administrators to go around.

As a board member, you can offer your expertise, but you should be careful about specific advice. "You are elected to the board to function as a generalist, *not* as a specialist," advised one superintendent who echoed the sentiments of the majority of people interviewed. "No matter what you do for a living, that's not your role on the board."

One particular danger area is the attorney who serves as a board member. School law is a recognized specialty, and unless you are specially trained in school-related matters, and keep up with the court decisions and changes in laws and regulations that relate to the schools, offering legal advice that is unrelated to your own area of expertise or law practice can place your district in many high risk situations.

So, although you might feel your expertise is needed, refrain from overusing it. When anyone presses you to use it in an inappropriate manner, follow your own best instincts. Remember, you are the expert, and a real expert not only knows the answers, but also knows *when* to offer them.

"It's all right for a board member who is an electrician to examine the electrical plan for a new school, but that's where it should stop."
—Board member, Idaho

"There have been times when 'expert' board members didn't know what they were talking about. They didn't have all the information our superintendent or business manager had, and they just ended up making life difficult for everybody and making idiots out of themselves."
—Board member, New York

"A board member who attempts to be the board's lawyer can find himself in trouble if he errs, and also can find himself swamped with work."
—Board member, New Mexico

"Mr. Hammer has called us all together to talk about what I believe he calls 'schematic designs.'"

Special tips for 'minority' board members

Are you unique among the majority of your board colleagues? Are you under 30 years old, when the rest of your board belongs to the over-40 group? Are you the only "senior" citizen? Are you the sole board member without children in the schools? Are you one female among males? The lone male? Are you Black, Hispanic, or Asian, while the rest of your board is White? Are you the only board member with a college degree? The sole farmer? The peerless teacher?

***"Sometimes you have to do some under-the-table dealing to make sure your concerns are heard and you have to keep stroking the other board members so they won't be intimidated."* —Board member, Massachusetts**

Being 'unique' has advantages

According to many veteran board members who belong to a "minority" group, being a minority member doesn't automatically mean that others view you as a single-issue board member. Your identity as a racial minority board member, for instance, may provide you an advantage and perspective from which to operate that others may not have. You may bring a unique set of experiences to the board which causes your board colleagues and others to listen a little harder when you speak. As one board member said, "The other board members know I represent a distinct part of the citizenry and they really give me their ear when I talk."

If you are young, you might have more immediate contact with students and teachers than your counterparts. "It hasn't been long since I was out of high school," one Nevada board member explained. "I've found that when I go into a classroom, the kids and teachers don't see me as an authority figure or as a threat. They are open to discussion, so I learn a lot."

Or, if you are a housewife or mother, there will be people who will perceive your perspective on the board to be in harmony with theirs, thus you might have a better chance than your board colleagues to determine what's really important to them, their peers, and their children. One Ohio board member explains: "I think most mothers are closest to their children's problems. I am free during the day and I am constantly talking with mothers and women's groups in the community."

***"It's gradually changing, but there's almost no escaping some assumptions made about women. Male board members and superintendents may worry about a woman's ability to make financial decisions as well as the next 'fellow.' They see her as limited to giving only a feminine or feminist point-of-view on issues."* —Board member, Florida**

Most of the advantages accrued from your minority board member status will come to you naturally. But, it's good to recognize your vantage points, just as it's good to recognize any disadvantages this status may pose for the achievement of your objectives on the board.

Some common problems

Few board members have quit board service because they were a minority on their boards. There have been some, however, who say they got tired of running the track alone and threw away their tennis shoes.

There are a few hurdles you may have to jump when you first take a seat as a minority member of your board. But these problems are not necessarily unique to minority board members.

Some of your new colleagues may question your ability to function as a

***"Some board members are destined to experience some discrimination because the other members on their boards believe (correctly or not) that they are on the board to look out for the best interests of people like themselves, and not for the interests of all groups."* —Board member, Hawaii**

There will be a few hurdles to jump.

"If you are really doing a good job as a board member, I don't care if you're Black, Indian, young, female, or what, your colleagues and the superintendent are going to have respect for that." —Board member, Colorado

member of the board "team" because of your unique status. Some may suspect that you will always be looking out only for the special interests you represent. Often, on some issues, you may have to straddle the fence between representing a narrow constituency and the interests of the entire district. Unlike board members who have no minority ties, you can't lose sight of the fact that a special group depends on you to represent their interests. But like all board members, to be successful, you also must think in terms of the team.

If the other board members believe you were appointed or elected to the board solely because you are a minority person, they may discount or disrupt your attempts to be effective. They might knowingly or unknowingly behave in a condescending manner and respond by over helping you. As one young board member explains: "When I first got on the board, the other board members tried to protect me from myself and others. They wanted to handle everything for me. It began to bother me, because I thought people weren't taking me seriously."

Like all others, you cast only one vote, and your fellow board members may choose to ignore how you cast it. On the other hand, if you tend to always join with other "minorities" on the board, you may be perceived as a threat. The majority may see you as the last straw that creates a voting bloc.

A few board members may try to categorize you, or assume they know what you're all about because you are like another "minority" they knew. One woman board member who was preceded by two other women, explained her experience: "The two women before me were middle-aged and very emotional. They were difficult people to get along with, I was told. I am outspoken, somewhat of a feminist, which neither of these two women had been. But, in the beginning, the six men on the board treated me the same way they had treated those women."

Essentials for clearing the hurdles

According to veteran board members, overcoming most forms of discrimination takes four things:

- ○ *Time and experience.* Eventually, you will be treated just like any other board member.
- ○ *Self-respect.* You have to be comfortable with yourself, and you have to take yourself seriously. If you don't, no one else will.
- ○ *Homework.* If you are prepared and you know what you're talking about, people will listen to what you say.
- ○ *Competency.* There's no substitute for competency. Doing a good job will win you the regard you desire.

If your colleagues can't accept the fact that you are on the board for the same reason they are—to see that the best possible education is provided to all children—there are other actions you can take. One board member suggests: "If you don't like things, try to change them. I didn't like being the only farmer on the board, so I campaigned to bring back a farmer who had been on the board before, but had been defeated."

SUGGESTION

If you are a minority board member, you don't have to go it alone. There are groups and caucuses of school board members at the state and national levels whose experiences and interests may be similar to your own.

NSBA cooperates with the National Caucus of Black School Board Members, the National Caucus of Hispanic School Board Members, and the National Caucus of Young School Board Members. The members of these caucuses discuss common problems, study issues of special interest, seek funding for special programs, and try to influence legislation. They also maintain contact with other national groups which have related interests. In the same vein, a few state school boards associations support women's caucuses, youth caucuses, rural caucuses, and other select interest groups.

How to handle education jargon

Can you define the following?

Criterion-referenced test

Debt service

Executive session

Single-loaded corridor

Due process

Administrative rule

Tangible property

P.L. 94-142

Check your answers in the "Board Glossary" in the back of this book.

> **"There's nothing worse than an uneducated board member. If you don't learn some of these terms, you can be kept in the dark. You won't be making the decisions—someone else will."**
> **—Board member, Georgia**

How well did you do?

These are just a few of the many words, abbreviations, and acronyms that confront board members daily. If you are a new board member and defined half of these terms correctly, give yourself a pat on the back. On the other hand, if you have several years of board service under your belt and you were unable to define most of these terms, some of your colleagues might think you have been asleep in the board room and neglecting your homework.

Learn this jargon, but...

Although you're not expected to know many educational terms when you first come aboard, you are expected to learn them. And, ironically, once you understand this arcane language, you'll need to use it sparingly, if you use it at all. School board veterans say they learn education jargon and then avoid using it — both in the name of eschewing obfuscation.

Why learn these terms?

To put it simply, you will want to learn the jargon of education so you won't feel, look like, or *be* a board dunce. You don't want to feel like a simpleton when some school administrator tells you that "the distributive education system has been shifted to involve a team teaching concept so that cognitive skills can be put back on a critical path through individualized instruction utilizing sequential learning." Learning such shoptalk will make it easier for you to discuss the most common concerns of your board.

MAINSTREAMING
INITIATIVE
CO-CURRICULAR
PERCENTILE

You'll need to tune into board buzzwords.

One more point: Learning the terms that often flow through board rooms is not a task limited to *new* board members. To communicate effectively about today's fast-changing issues, *all* board members need to tune in constantly to new words. Old words often are inadequate to explain complicated new activities and concepts.

Here are some clues for mastering the basics of this second language.

Study and learn the terms. It is likely that you will see and hear the terms in this section again. Study them and become familiar with their meanings. But take note: These are not the only words, phrases, and acronyms to which you will be exposed. Each state has special laws that contain numerous terms that are important to your schools. There are also a number of federal laws that have particular meaning to many districts. Ask the superintendent or board president to get you a glossary of terms most frequently used in your area. Such glossaries often are published by your state school boards association or your state department of education. Many topical publications—such as those covering legislation, public relations, and labor relations—contain glossaries of significant terms. Regular reading of journals published by education organizations will help you master and keep up with the jargon of education.

"Whenever anybody starts throwing that gobbledegook around, they should be stopped and asked to speak English." —School administrator, Texas

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Polysyllabic descriptions of simple terms are as common to schools of education as four-letter words are to a Marine boot camp. Often teachers and administrators use these words and phrases without knowing they are confusing anyone. When the words get thick and meanings get muddled, you have every right to clear the air. Ask: "What exactly do you mean by an assessment ratio?" Or ask: "Can you give me an example of what an open building system is supposed to accomplish?" If you are still in the dark, simply ask: "Could you say that in plain English?"

FUZZY WORDS

"The worst thing a board member can do is be afraid or embarrassed to ask what things mean. You won't appear stupid if you ask questions, but you might be stupid if you don't ask." —Board member, Michigan

Jot down terms you don't know.

Attend meetings and conventions. Once you have looked over the board glossary and have some idea of how these words and phrases are used, your next step is to go where education jargon is the native tongue. Sign up for a state or national school board or administrators' convention, where even casual conversations will give you new insights into the meanings of these terms. During the workshops, listen and take notes. Take your glossary along, and write down the words or phrases that confuse you. You might be surprised how quickly you can pick it all up.

"It's not uncommon to find that the person who's using a word hasn't got the foggiest idea of what it means....It just sounds good or he might just be trying to impress you." —Superintendent, California

Try it out. It's one thing to sit and read a newspaper in Spanish, and quite another to ask a waiter for a cup of coffee in that language. Once you've been exposed to education gobbledegook for some time, try using it. But remember, these terms often mean many different things to different people. You might find that a media resource center can be an elaborate room filled with electric gadgets, a library, or a pile of books on a table in the back of a third-grade classroom.

"It's inevitable that you'll pick up and actually feel comfortable with some educationeze. But if you do, you run the risk of sounding like an educator — not a public representative." —Board member, Mississippi

Pitfalls to avoid

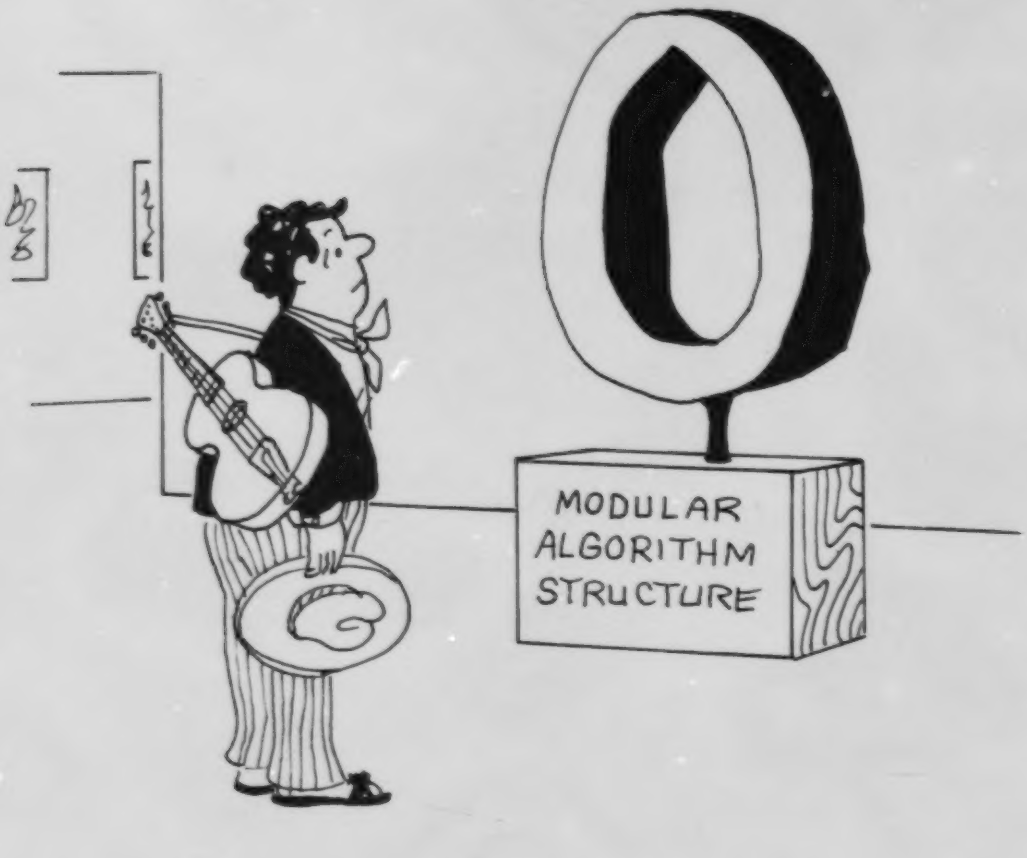
Once you learn to talk this way, it's a great temptation to do so as a sign that you are no longer a novice in the ways of education and school boardsmanship. As one board member explained: "After a while, you find yourself slipping into the habit of using education terms. It becomes easier to talk in this kind of shorthand because you can say what you mean with less effort. You start thinking in these terms and you forget that others don't quite understand."

Another caution: Too often, educators, board members, and others adopt education jargon as a way to sound intelligent or to hide the fact that they don't know exactly what they are talking about. As one school public information director in Texas put it: "Jargon does nothing but confuse people or put them off. . . . I've seen people make presentations to the board, using a bunch of words, and everybody would sit and nod their heads wisely when *nobody* knew what was being said." When someone uses a term for the first time, don't assume everyone is on the same track. Ask them to explain the term as they are using it. Rephrase what they said and ask them if you have understood them correctly. Or, ask them to rephrase what they have said.

All this is easier than it might sound and progress is being made. After a direct hint from the school board, one superintendent issued a statement to all school employees that read: "It is the responsibility of the board, the superintendent, and the rest of the staff to make sure plain language is spoken here."

SUGGESTION

Once you've mastered these terms, take action to stamp out education gobbledegook in your district. See that the minutes of your school board meetings and school system newsletters are purged of all unnecessary education terms. There is no reason that the records of your meetings must contain words and phrases that are going to confuse your constituents. Second, as a board, instruct the superintendent that all background papers prepared by the administration for board meetings be cleansed of unnecessary education jargon. Clear speech and thought run parallel courses, and you should be spared the task of wading through ambiguous words and phrases in order to understand what a proposal is all about.



WORDS YOU SHOULD KNOW

There are some terms from which you are not likely to escape, no matter how hard you try. You will hear these and other terms in the board room, from your board colleagues, from administrators, and from school architects and contractors. You will hear them from teachers, parents, negotiators, and legislators. You will hear them at meetings and at conventions where board members gather, and you will read them in education publications.

Experienced school board members say the most difficult terms to learn are those associated with instruction — especially those defining different types of curricula and learning atmospheres. The second most difficult area of terms is that relating to personnel. There is also noneducation-related jargon that may cause you problems, such as "verbalize," "implement," and "self-oriented."

Tune in to these words. If you don't know these terms when you hear or see them, check the "Board Glossary" in this book, or look them up in one of the other educational publications listed in this section. Ask that they be explained to you in local terms: What do they mean for your district? What other terms have significance in your district?

Once you feel comfortable, use these terms cautiously. Make sure everyone listening understands what you are saying.

GOBBLEDEGOOK
ACRONYMS
ABBREV.
INITIALS

SCHOOL BUSINESS AND FINANCE

- ☐ Ad valorem taxes
- ☐ Allotment formula
- ☐ Appropriation, line item
- ☐ Assessment ratio
- ☐ A.D.A. (Average Daily Attendance)
- ☐ Bid
- ☐ Bonds
- ☐ Budget, capital outlay
- ☐ Budget, functional
- ☐ Budget, operating or general fund
- ☐ Capital outlay
- ☐ Cash fund
- ☐ Current expense
- ☐ Debt service
- ☐ Deficit
- ☐ Demographic data
- ☐ Entitlements
- ☐ Fiscal year
- ☐ Grants-n-aid
- ☐ Intangible property
- ☐ M & O (Maintenance and Operations)
- ☐ Matching funds
- ☐ Noncategorical funds
- ☐ P.P.B.E.S. or P.P.B.S.
- ☐ Real property
- ☐ Requisition
- ☐ Sinking fund
- ☐ Tangible property
- ☐ Tax rate
- ☐ Valuation, assessed
- ☐ Valuation, state equalized
- ☐ Valuation, true
- ☐ Voucher
- ☐ Voucher plan

BOARD OPERATIONS AND SCHOOL AND PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

- ☐ *Ad hoc*
- ☐ Administration
- ☐ Bylaws
- ☐ Class-A lunch
- ☐ Committee, advisory
- ☐ Committee, standing
- ☐ Committee, steering
- ☐ Continuing education
- ☐ *De facto* segregation
- ☐ Executive session
- ☐ *Ex officio* member
- ☐ Liability, board
- ☐ Liability, personal
- ☐ MBO (Management by Objectives)
- ☐ Policy
- ☐ R & D (Research and Development)
- ☐ Recall
- ☐ Systems analysis
- ☐ Time sharing
- ☐ Tort

SCHOOL AND BUILDING PLANNING AND CONSTRUCTION

- ☐ Contractor
- ☐ Decibel
- ☐ Diffusion
- ☐ Direct and indirect lighting
- ☐ Divisible classroom
- ☐ Leeway
- ☐ Master plan
- ☐ Open building system
- ☐ Portable classroom
- ☐ Physical plant
- ☐ Preliminary drawings
- ☐ Schematic designs or drawings
- ☐ Single-loaded corridor
- ☐ Site
- ☐ Sound absorption

EDUCATION

Instruction

- ☐ Accountability
- ☐ Basic education
- ☐ Career education
- ☐ Co-curricular
- ☐ Cognitive
- ☐ Compensatory education
- ☐ Competency-based education
- ☐ Critical path
- ☐ Cumulative record
- ☐ Curriculum
- ☐ Curriculum guide
- ☐ Distributive education
- ☐ Educational policy
- ☐ Extra-curricular
- ☐ Elective
- ☐ Fine arts
- ☐ Gifted

- ☐ Hardware
- ☐ Individualized instruction
- ☐ Interdisciplinary
- ☐ Language arts
- ☐ Language laboratory
- ☐ Learning resource center
- ☐ Lesson plan
- ☐ Linguistics
- ☐ Magnet school
- ☐ Mastery learning
- ☐ Microfiche
- ☐ Microfilm
- ☐ Multi-media
- ☐ Parent-teacher conference
- ☐ Performance contracting
- ☐ Phonics
- ☐ Pre-school education
- ☐ Programmed instruction
- ☐ Psycho-motor skills
- ☐ Reading readiness
- ☐ Remedial
- ☐ Sequence
- ☐ Social promotion
- ☐ Social studies
- ☐ Software
- ☐ Supplementary reader
- ☐ Transcript
- ☐ Vocational education

Testing and Evaluation

- ☐ A.C.T. (American College Test)
- ☐ Ability test
- ☐ Aptitude test
- ☐ C.R.T. (Criterion-Referenced Test)
- ☐ E.T.S. (Educational Testing Service)
- ☐ I.Q. (Intelligence Quotient)
- ☐ Norm reference
- ☐ Percentile
- ☐ Program, evaluation
- ☐ Quartile
- ☐ S.A.T. (Scholastic Aptitude Test)
- ☐ Standardized test

Special Education

- ☐ Barrier-free
- ☐ Early childhood education
- ☐ Educable
- ☐ E.M.R. (Educable Mentally Retarded)
- ☐ Exceptional child
- ☐ Homebound instruction
- ☐ Learning disabilities
- ☐ Mainstreaming
- ☐ M.R. (Mentally Retarded)
- ☐ PL 94-142
- ☐ T.M.R. (Trainable Mentally Retarded)

PERSONNEL AND LABOR RELATIONS

- ☐ Arbitration
- ☐ Certification
- ☐ Class load
- ☐ Collective bargaining
- ☐ Credit hour
- ☐ Employee benefits
- ☐ Fixed salary schedule
- ☐ Free time
- ☐ Fringe benefits
- ☐ Grandfather clause
- ☐ Grievance
- ☐ Grievance arbitration
- ☐ In-service education
- ☐ Itinerant teacher
- ☐ Job action
- ☐ Job description
- ☐ Licensure
- ☐ Master teacher
- ☐ Mediation
- ☐ Merit rating
- ☐ Nepotism
- ☐ Paraprofessional
- ☐ Professional days
- ☐ Pupil-teacher ratio
- ☐ Revocation, certificate
- ☐ Sabbatical leave
- ☐ Sabbatical teaching year
- ☐ Student teacher
- ☐ Support staff
- ☐ Suspensions, teacher
- ☐ Teacher aide
- ☐ Team leader
- ☐ Team teaching
- ☐ Tenure
- ☐ Worker's, compensation
- ☐ Yard duty

LEGISLATIVE/GOVERNMENT

- ☐ Administrative law
- ☐ Administrative order
- ☐ Amendment
- ☐ Appeal
- ☐ Bill
- ☐ Chair
- ☐ Committee
- ☐ Consent calendar
- ☐ Enactment, date of
- ☐ Federal register
- ☐ Filibuster
- ☐ Floor
- ☐ Hearing
- ☐ Initiative
- ☐ Leader, majority
- ☐ Leader, minority
- ☐ Petition
- ☐ Plurality
- ☐ Referendum
- ☐ Resolution
- ☐ Rider
- ☐ Sponsor

ORGANIZATIONS TO NOTE

Educational organizations are responsible for dumping many of the acronyms (composed of initials or parts of compound terms usually read or said as a single word) and initialisms (initials or parts of compound terms read or said letter by letter) into a board member's word world.

Most board members learn the letters or acronyms for local organizations, as well as whom they represent and what they do.

AASA: American Association of School Administrators
AFT: American Federation of Teachers
ALA: American Library Association
ASBO: Association of School Business Officials
ASCD: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
ASFSA: American School Food Service Association
CCSSO: Council of Chief State School Officers
CEFP: Council of Educational Facility Planners
IDEA: Institute for Development of Educational Activities
NCATE: National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education
NAESP: National Association of Elementary School Principals
NASBE: National Association of State Boards of Education
NASE: National Academy for School Executives
NASSP: National Association of Secondary School Principals
NEA: National Education Association
NIE: National Institute of Education
NSBA: National School Boards Association
NSF: National Science Foundation
NSSEA: National School Supply and Equipment Association
PTA: Parent-Teacher Association

A guide for effective board-colleague relationships

How you and the others on your board interact—or fail to interact—will vary from year to year, depending on the personalities on the board, the skills and needs of individual board members, the board's relationship with the superintendent, the effectiveness of the administration, pressure exerted by special interest groups, the issues facing the board, and other factors.

"If you find that you and your fellow board members are having difficulty in your dealings with one another, it's time to talk."
—Board member, California

It's not uncommon for board members to form voting blocs or factions, to play one against the other, or hold grudges. At times on some boards the going gets so rough that board members bicker with one another, stalk out of meetings, cease speaking with each other, or fail to show up for a meeting. Because of the importance of the school board member's task, differences in philosophies and opinions that are acceptable in most relationships are not acceptable among board members. Small disagreements can fester to astronomical proportions, causing stress, strained relationships, and loss of sleep. In extreme cases, discord can lead to the resignation of one or more board members.

"The importance of the personal relationship between board members is overplayed. We are smart enough to know when our philosophies and constituencies differ, and we vote on an issue-by-issue basis. It is important that the board members appear to have good working and personal relationships."
—Board member, District of Columbia

For most boards, though, constant division and dissidence is not the norm. Efforts to set and reach common district goals serve as a glue to bind board members together and to bridge conflicting philosophies, needs, and desires.

To be an effective member of your board, you will need an understanding of your fellow board members, and of the way in which you and they work together.

Getting to know them

Knowing and understanding your board colleagues is one of the keys to establishing, building, and maintaining good working relationships with them. It is important to know more than their professions, where they live, and whether they have children in the schools. As one board veteran put it: "You will be making crucial decisions together. You will be trying to influence them and they you, so you will need to find out where they are coming from."

"It is my feeling you understand better how other people react by knowing something about their backgrounds."
—Board member, Texas

You can do this by asking yourself: "What does this person need?" "What has he stood for in the past?" "Where has he been successful?" "*How* was he successful?" "Where has he failed?" Finding out what professional and civic memberships a person actively pursues, what committees of the board he has served on or led, what board offices he has held, and whether he is tied to a special interest group should help you develop your understanding.

GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

"We mutually respect the fact that each of us has special interests. It's a darn good thing that someone is looking out for all these various interests as much as possible."
—Board member, New Hampshire

"If you are having difficulty with a colleague, talk to the board chairperson. The chair has the responsibility of conducting the meetings and keeping the board working productively."
—Board member, Oregon

As you look around the board table, you might find a board member who rarely smiles and another who can keep you in stitches. You might see shy colleagues, loudmouths, associates you would call intelligent, and ones you think are bullheaded.

Whatever their special attributes, you will need to ask yourself, "What do I need to do to establish and build a good working relationship with each of these individuals?" If there is a particular board member you don't like, you might ask, "Why?" Could there be some information you need to better understand and to be more tolerant of this person?

Working together

When asked what kinds of things make a difference between board members who work well together and those who do not, board veterans from large, small, urban, and rural school districts identified the following basics:

- Take a good look at yourself. Your assumptions about yourself and your situation affect your ability to communicate with others—how you see, hear, evaluate, and understand people and issues.
- Have a willingness to listen to others.
- Take care to express yourself clearly, checking to be sure that the others understand your statements and stands on issues.
- Adhere to the code of ethics or conduct established by the board.
- Subject your conduct to self-scrutiny and periodic evaluation.
- Make friends in the same way you would make friends anywhere—going to lunch, socializing at public and private functions, and exchanging news by telephone.
- Keep an open mind.
- Disclose yourself to others openly and freely. Some people have said that we understand only as much of ourselves as we are willing to communicate to others. The more you know about each other, the more efficient and effective your communication will be.
- Publicly support your board colleagues.
- Publicly support decisions made by the entire board.
- Attempt to avoid over-reaction to district problems and board disagreements.
- Respect other people's skills and attitudes.

Not listening is a big mistake.

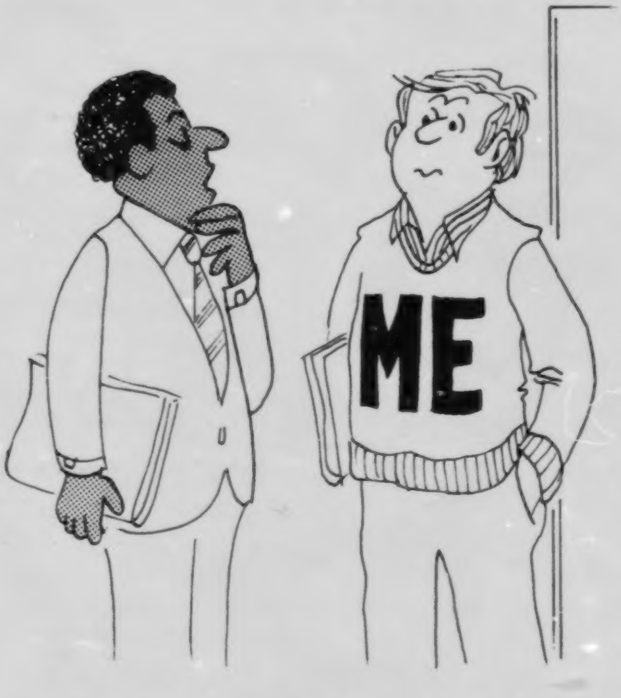
"When a board colleague tells someone he can 'take care' of their problem, it really gets me. In essence, he has tried to speak for me and the rest of the board, which he can't do. This kind of conduct gives me the impression that he thinks he can outguess me . . . that he thinks he knows how I will vote on every issue. I don't even know that!" —Board member, Nebraska

The 'team' approach

An underlying premise here is that you and the rest of the people on your board *want* to work together in a *team* effort. Most board members agree that the team approach depends on a "we're all in this together" attitude. Being a part of the team does not mean ceasing to be yourself or refraining from expressing your individual concerns. It *does* mean recognizing the value of the other "selves" you work with who make up the whole, and observing that, in reality, the board is the *self*.

The board is the authority (legally, board members have no individual authority), and only by reaching decisions together can individual board members exercise this authority. How well board members integrate their *selves* into a board depends on constructive use of time and energy. To many board members, this means sticking together, following the rules, and working to achieve specific, mutually agreed-upon ends.

Of course, some board members never join the team. They continue to represent only themselves or the interests of the people they consider their constituents. They are likely to make promises or commitments for the board outside the board room. Nevertheless, most board members find the team approach most consistent with the rationale for having school boards, and most effective in streamlining the work of the board.



"Wilson, about your idea of a 'team approach'. . ."

Some words about dissidents and dissidence

Board members who don't think and act as part of a team, who are difficult to get along with, often become ineffective. They are left out of the decision-making process, which is a loss to the entire board.

Most board members have good intentions and some of those considered "difficult" may not realize they are part of a problem. It's in a district's interest to at least try to bring such board members "around."

"You need to realize that dissidents are people hungry for recognition. Give them an assignment or position that will satisfy that appetite." —President, petroleum equipment industry

"At school board meetings, I'm H. P. Donlevy, the sometimes irrascible administrator; but at home I'm just grumpy Harry."

Tips

"Don't ever attack or scold another board member in the board room. You will only make things worse," advised a Utah board member, echoing the advice of many. "Get together with this person *outside* the board meeting to discuss areas of disagreement," he said. "This way, you will have a better chance of reaching agreement, and you will also be taking a positive step toward decreasing the amount of debate that occurs during your board meetings. Above all, keep your discussion to board matters and concerns. Don't turn to personal affairs, and respect the other guy's opinion."

"Don't let a dissident catch your board by surprise. When you see trouble coming, quietly let some of your key members know it in advance of a meeting." *—Superintendent, Kentucky*

Working to reduce conflict with a particular board member must be a board effort, but efforts can be undertaken by individual board members. One board member who found that he was unable to get along with a new board member was challenged by the rest of the board to "bring the guy around." He said: "It took me a year, but I did it. I included him in everything, addressed my remarks to him. We had lunch together, and I tried to make him see how his attitudes were hurting everybody. All the problems haven't been solved, but he works with us now a lot more than he works against us."

Dissidence and dissidents are not always destructive to board operations. While it is true that those who play the dissident role for power's sake or to elicit favors or concessions from other board members are destructive, board members who are "occasional dissidents" may prove beneficial to the district. They may cause other board members to discuss and define their personal positions on issues. They can serve to keep the board and the administration on their toes and they can consolidate the support of the other board members. They may also needle the board and the administration into making needed changes. NSBA research has shown that *some* dissent among board members actually enhances board credibility among members of the public.

You don't have to be a troublemaker to cause trouble...

You may have people on your board who really aren't causing any problems, but they cause unrest because they simply don't carry their share of the board's burden. In such cases, there are things you can do to get these fellow board members more involved in board activities. Here's what some board veterans suggest:

- ○ In a personal conversation, point out their areas of expertise and suggest they get involved in these areas in your district.
- ○ Suggest to your board president that he appoint them to a committee.
- ○ Take them with you when you visit schools or suggest they visit the schools on a regular basis.
- ○ During board meetings, ask for their opinions.
- ○ Listen to them and do so honestly.
- ○ Share and discuss with them publications or clippings which you find interesting.
- ○ Encourage them to attend state and national school boards association meetings, especially orientation workshops for board members. Take them to these meetings when you can.

BUILDING BOARD UNITY: HOW ONE BOARD DOES IT

When the members of some boards aren't getting along, they confront their problems during a weekend retreat, completely away from familiar surroundings and peers.

One school board member explained how this has worked in his district:

"It would have been easy to say our personalities clash and that is why we did not get along with each other, but that excuse would not hold water. We chose to devote a full weekend to settling our differences. So deep-seated were our problems and feelings that we asked the executive secretary of the Wyoming School Boards Association to attend and facilitate.

"It was at this meeting that we vented our feelings, mistrust, and allegations of all kinds. Everything was laid out squarely on the table. For a full 24 hours, we really communicated. We began to see each other's views for the first time. We were able to share our frustrations with each other, as well as our good feelings, ideas, and other experiences. As the weekend moved on, we began to feel a sense of unity, a feeling of hope, and a sense of duty.

"We left that weekend retreat as friends who had vowed an increase in trust, sincerity and, most of all, communication. We also left with a certain amount of apprehension. 'Is this really going to work?' 'Will it last for a few days, and then will we revert to our former positions?'

"Well, it *did* work, not because of the retreat, but because of what we found out about each other and why we felt the way we did about our responsibilities on the board. We tried and tried very hard. People can change if they want to. We wanted to and we did!

"This year, we had another retreat to discuss our differences. However, this time, the focus was not so much on our personal problems, but on education.

"Since we have been 'retreating,' our working relationship has been great. It is good to have someone on the board who can give praise and a pat on the back for a job well done. There is also great pleasure in being able to disagree without being disagreeable."

HOW TO GET OFF ON THE WRONG FOOT WITH YOUR BOARD COLLEAGUES

When asked, "How can a new school board member get off on the wrong foot with colleagues?" experienced board members replied:

- Be belligerent.
- Talk too much or too loud.
- Have all the solutions for all the problems of the district.
- Fail to be a good listener.
- Neglect to read your board policy manual.
- Demonstrate apathy.
- Discuss with press and constituents board matters discussed in executive session.
- Back-stab another board colleague.
- Monopolize the media and public spotlight.
- Indicate you will support an issue in one way, then vote differently without giving any advance notice.
- Be indifferent to the experience of your colleagues and ignore their advice.
- Be inflexible, never explain alternative decisions or change your mind on issues.
- Publicly criticize a board decision when your vote was in the minority.

3

IN THE BOARD ROOM

"This school board meeting is nothing. You should see us when we get organized!"

School board members are little different from the cobblers who don't take time to mend their own shoes, or the mechanics who don't take time to repair their own automobiles. "Meetinged" to death, few take time from their busy agendas to step back and objectively evaluate the quality of their meetings. They should.

What you and your board colleagues do in your meetings reflects the attitudes, relationships, and organization of your school system. Thus, the problem of unproductive meetings can be part of a larger problem of ineffective organization. At the same time, the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of your board room deliberations can affect how school employees view and perform their work, how students learn, and whether citizens do or do not support the schools.

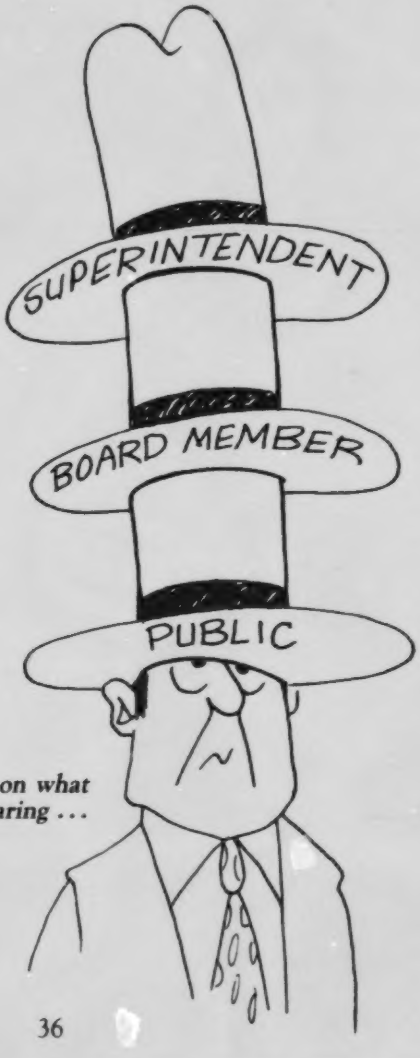
Of course, saying you want to have effective board meetings is easy. Having them is another matter. You might be able to empathize with the Connecticut board member who said:

"Most of our actions around the board table are defensive, restrictive, argumentative, punitive, trivial, or controlling of some minor administrative item. Many of our actions—by force of circumstance—separate and alienate us from teachers; fail to bring parents and taxpayers closer to the schools; and do little to help us understand the student, or to help the students understand their community and their environment, and to prepare for the future. As I walk home after each meeting, I ask: 'Why couldn't we have done something to inspire, inform, or illuminate?'"

Defining effective

A first step in having effective board meetings is to take a look at what makes meetings effective. Point of view is important. "Effective" depends on which hat you are wearing — superintendent, school board member, or member of the public.

For a superintendent, an effective board meeting might be one in which there were no surprises, unexpected requests, attacks, or crises. It would start on time. Board members would have read the agenda and back-up material. Staff would be treated courteously. There would be opportunity for full presentation of the pros and cons, recommendations, and alternatives for each agenda item, and for input into goal setting and evaluation.



It all depends on what hat you're wearing . . .

A board member might believe that an effective board meeting is one for which the board received helpful background material on agenda items far enough in advance of the meeting to study it. There would be an opportunity to suggest agenda items. The superintendent would be prepared with recommendations and alternative solutions to issues. The board president would be in control of the meeting, providing sufficient, though limited, time for discussion. Expert advice would be available to the board. The meeting room would be comfortable, and the meeting would end on time.

The public might view favorably a board meeting that was announced ahead of time and clearly reported board action afterwards. Agendas would be made available. Members of the audience would be allowed to speak or ask questions on any educational topic. The board would have adequate discussion on items, expressing more than one point of view. There would seem to be a balance between the emphasis put on business and curriculum matters. All in all, the schools would appear to be running smoothly — buses on time, staff teaching effectively, and the budget under control.

Gaining control

Your district must decide for itself what constitutes an effective board meeting and then set policies accordingly. Most state laws specify certain requirements for school board meetings, so any operating bylaws that your board adopts will need to comply with those in your state. You won't want to adopt verbatim the provisions of state statutes relating to boards as part of your bylaws. (Legally, a board lacks authority to "reenact" language already adopted by the state legislature.) But you will want to put the following in writing:

When your meetings will be held. Most board members report having one or two *regular* meetings per month. The day and time of the meeting should be set annually and publicly announced. If the regular board meeting falls on a holiday, the meeting is often set for the next business day. If a regular meeting is postponed or re-scheduled for any reason, this fact should be publicized well in advance of the change.

If the board president or chairman is authorized to call a *special meeting* at any time, it is important timely notice be given and an agenda posted appropriately.

"Attention to the physical setting of a meeting can't guarantee a good meeting, but it can prevent a bad one."
—John Lindelow,
Making Meetings More Effective

Where they will take place. Some boards, by law, must hold their regular meetings in the same place each time. Other boards have leeway to hold their meetings anywhere, even outside of the district. In an effort to increase community involvement in the schools, some boards have experimented with moving the location of their meetings from place to place, and this seems to work if well publicized.

Deciding where a board meets should not be taken lightly. A room too big, too austere, too ostentatious, too crowded, or too noisy will impede communication and board decision making. As one Mississippi superintendent put it: "Some things obviously seem insignificant, but they are insignificant only because you have never had a problem. For instance, a newly painted board room with poor ventilation can be a cause of illness, nausea, and headaches."

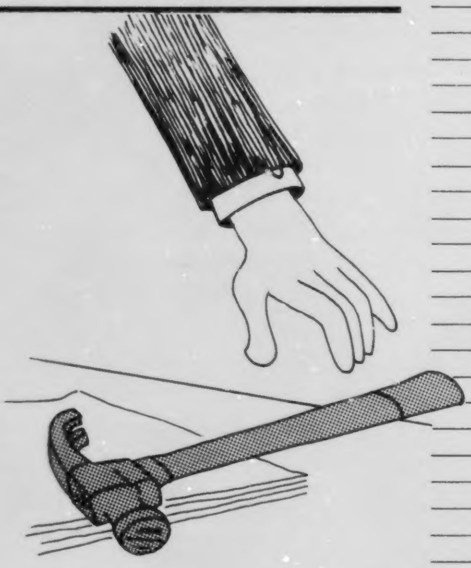
Care should be taken to see to it that the chairs are comfortable, the lighting is not too harsh or dim, the temperature is not too hot or cold, and that the room is well insulated from distracting noises. People understand each other better when they can see one another. Seats should be arranged so that they can. A U-shaped table is best, allowing board members to see each other, as well as other participants and the audience.

"You should spend time at every meeting on some child-centered items. Ask for special reports on some educational innovation or accomplishment to illustrate in a graphic way that you are primarily concerned with the education of children."
—Board member, Arkansas

The board's role. Since the only place a board can take action is during board meetings, board members must be clear as to what they are charged to do at these meetings. Specifically, a board should have operating procedures that govern how it will determine the goals of the district, establish policy, provide management oversite for all school programs, and communicate with the public and staff during board meetings.

The board president's role. It's the board president's or chairman's job to see that the meeting is run by the rules of order and bylaws that the board establishes. Usually, the board president meets with the superintendent to plan the agenda for all meetings. The president also:

- ○ Opens the meeting.
- ○ Announces the order of business.
- ○ Recognizes members who wish to speak.
- ○ Rules a motion out of order, or puts it to a vote.
- ○ Announces the result of each vote.
- ○ Enforces all questions of order.
- ○ Authenticates by signature all acts, orders, and procedures.
- ○ Declares the meeting adjourned.



"A chairman's gavel is an instrument of power. I have observed chairmen who had forgotten their gavel cracking their knuckles against table tops, rapping a felt-tip pen with machine-gun rapidity, and finally hollering for order in the board room. Message: Have a back-up gavel in case one is lost or forgotten."
—Superintendent, Mississippi

Some presidents use the influence of the chair to get things accomplished. On the other hand, citing ethics, some presidents refrain from interjecting their own opinions into issues before the board. The fact that a person has been elected to preside over the board, however, does not remove his ability or responsibility to participate in board deliberations. The president is entitled to vote on all issues.

The superintendent's role. In many states, the school superintendent serves, by law, as an officer of the board. Functioning as the board secretary, or another title, he usually is responsible for preparing the board agenda and taking care of meeting details before the meeting. The superintendent does not conduct or control the meetings; but, as the chief school administrator for the district, he provides information and counsel to the board. Usually, the superintendent is responsible for giving advance notification and the follow-up reports to the public, and for keeping records of the meetings.

Other staff members. In most districts, especially when a management team is operating, staff members participate in board meetings by providing information to the board that relates to areas for which they are responsible. Because all staff members are responsible to the superintendent, board requests for information from the staff should go through the superintendent.

The board secretary. The board secretary or clerk can be the superintendent or a board member selected to be the board secretary. In some districts, the superintendent's secretary serves as the board's secretary, and is responsible for recording all proceedings (taking or seeing that minutes are taken), preserving all records (such as committee reports), and furnishing copies of the minutes to members. The board secretary may also be responsible for keeping accounts of expenses incurred by the board (with the board treasurer, if there is one).

Public participation. If your regular board meetings are like most, they will draw a crowd of about 10 citizens or less. According to NSBA research, only school systems with large numbers of students or urban districts claim citizens attend meetings in any significant numbers. Exceptions to the norm occur when boards hold public hearings on matters intensely relevant to the community, such as the budget, the tax rate, or the closing of a school. For these, hundreds of citizens may come.

The people most likely to frequent your board meetings will include administrative staff; teachers; choir, band, and athletic booster club sponsors; and PTA, PTO, and other school program leaders. All have the right to attend (except for executive sessions). Depending on your board bylaws, all may have the right to speak.

Your board should have a policy on how a person can request speaking time, when he can speak, and how long he can speak. Usually five to 10 minutes is the maximum, depending on the number of speakers. There should also be a procedure established whereby anyone wanting the board to address a specific concern can submit their request (usually to the superintendent) in time for inclusion on the agenda.

"There will be a three minute time limit on discussion."

SUGGESTION

Sometimes the public shows up at board meetings for the express purpose of criticizing or defaming a staff member or employee of the school system. If this happens, your president should refuse to allow the person to make the statement in public. If your board wishes, your president can offer to meet with the citizen privately. Even if you think the criticism has no merit, it is usually beneficial to give the citizen the benefit of the doubt and to let it be known that your board will listen. The person should be asked to put his complaint in writing. Such matters should be initially channeled to the administration.

Some boards hold special community meetings, at which no actions are taken, for the sole purpose of listening to public comments, concerns, and complaints. Large districts may have as many as one per month, while a smaller constituency can often be well served by two such meetings each school year.

Participation by employee group representatives. The same policies and procedures your board adopts for citizens to bring their concerns to the board should also apply to union or association leaders. As with others, boards allow union employee group representatives to provide information, but do not allow open debate of issues that belong on the bargaining table, or the *ad hoc* airing of grievances that should be handled through established procedures.

How the meeting will be run. Your board may be strict or flexible in its adherence to parliamentary procedure, but *establishing* what the rules of order will be is important to maintain the president's impartiality, to preserve an objective and impersonal approach to the issues brought before the board, to protect individual rights of speech, and to maintain a good working relationship among board members.

"Some of the procedures in Robert's Rules are not permitted by some state laws."—State association executive, Kansas

Many boards establish in policy that they will follow *Robert's Rules of Order*, and note that they can suspend the rules by a two-thirds vote. Boards in smaller school districts may specifically adopt the "Procedure in Small Boards" which appears in *Robert's Rules*.

According to most board members, an overwhelming dedication to procedure can be non-productive. Most

"There's none of the pleasure you once got in doing public service when you attend board meetings in constant conflict. It's absolute agony."
—Board member, Alabama

boards strive for a tone that is courteous and business-like, that allows for discussion, but that does not allow discussion to get out of control.

Dealing with disorder. Procedures for handling disorder in the board room should be in writing, and should be checked by the school attorney. Backed by sound policy, the board president can usually maintain board room decorum.

For members of the audience who become unruly –– shouting or otherwise interrupting board work, board presidents usually have the authority to do several things:

- Order anyone causing a disturbance to leave the board room.
- Order a brief recess until order is restored.
- Adjourn and reconvene at a time and place selected by a majority vote.

Usually the threat of a recess or adjournment will help restore calm. Another technique is to table the agenda item which precipitated the incident and proceed with other matters. In extreme cases, especially if physical harm is threatened, order a recess and summon the police.

The board president has less authority when it comes to controlling members of the board who become disorderly. Slight breaches of order can be pointed out politely. For more serious offenses, like questioning another board member's motives or attacking personalities, the president can rule the offender's remarks out of order, and direct him to speak to the issue or relinquish the floor. In the case of grave breaches of order, the chair can "name" the offender, which amounts to preferring charges for disorderly conduct. Of course, this is a board's last resort.

Although the chair has no authority to impose a penalty or to remove the offender from the room, he can ask the board to impose a penalty. A board member would then make a motion that the offender be required to make an apology, be censured, or be required to leave the meeting (although this drastic action is difficult, if not impossible, to enforce).

Planning: the agenda is key

Although planning for a good board meeting is crucial, few board members concern themselves with it. As noted earlier, in most cases, the superintendent is responsible for developing the meeting agenda, which is the heart of an organized, structured meeting.

Most experts point out at least three purposes for the board agenda:

- To set the order in which items will be handled during the board meeting.
- To expedite procedure and prevent wasting time.
- To allow board members time to study and think about complex or controversial matters prior to the meeting.

In the course of preparing the agenda, the superintendent is likely to consult with the board president and members of the administrative staff. Anybody — board members, citizens, or

"Conducting a meeting without a plan is much like trying to build a house without blueprints."
—Jack T. Parker, The Collier Quick and Easy Guide to Running a Meeting

"The agenda is essentially a control device. It says, 'Here is what we will discuss; we will discuss them in this order; presentations will be made by these people; recommendations are being made on these items; and, eventually, we will adjourn.'"
—Board member, Utah

"What's this 'bring home milk, bread, and something for supper' doing in the school board's agenda, Miss Powers?"

staff — can request in advance that an item be put on the agenda. Many board presidents and superintendents let petitioners know if an item is to be placed on an agenda and, if it's not placed, explain why. Some state laws or your board bylaws may speak more fully on how agenda items are placed, and might also be more specific. The agenda may include:

- *Action items* on which the board is expected to reach a decision during the meeting.
- *Consent items* addressing routine matters such as minutes and monthly expenses, which can be approved together without discussion.
- *Discussion items* requiring discussion, but upon which action is not anticipated.
- *Information items* which require no action or discussion unless a board member asks for clarification.

"Aside from their importance in helping the meeting to flow, agendas, if you file them, are a quick reference guide to past meetings and decisions." —Board member, North Carolina

Agenda items are placed in a format in a sequence which usually has been determined by board policy. Most boards put their business into an order similar to the following:

- Call to order.
- Roll call.
- Approval of minutes.
- Financial report (which may include authorization for expenditures in smaller districts).
- Citizen participation.
- Reports and recommendations of the superintendent.
- Unfinished business.
- New business.
- Reports of special or advisory committees.
- Recommendations or questions from individual board members.
- Announcements.
- Adjournment.

"If you have what you need at the meeting, you won't have to stop to find something out, or worse, postpone the discussion until another meeting." —Board member, Tennessee

The agenda should be as specific as possible. Items to be voted on should be so listed. Persons wishing to speak before the board should be named. Some boards place a time limit on each agenda item to help keep discussion flowing.

"At the top of our agenda is a place for correspondence. Here, too, citizens have the opportunity to express their viewpoints to the school board on any issue of vital concern." —Superintendent, Connecticut

An important part of the agenda (and an important planning and control tool) is the background information that relates to agenda topics. This is prepared by the administration and sent to board members, preferably about three days in advance to allow time for study by board members. Having this kind of detail in writing before the meeting forces meeting planners to obtain the kind of information the board will need at the meeting.

Following the agenda

Although board business does not necessarily need to be limited to the prepared agenda (unless required by state law or board bylaws), sticking to it has definite advantages. Meetings go more smoothly and there are fewer crises when "surprise" issues are not brought to the board prematurely. A citizen or board member should be allowed to raise an issue for information, but the issue should be deferred for board consideration until at least the next meeting.

"The organization that coined the phrase, 'The best surprise is no surprise at all,' had school boards in mind. No surprises make for a smooth meeting." —Board member, Minnesota

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SUGGESTION

One of the biggest changes in board agendas has been the inclusion of a consent calendar or consent agenda. In the past, many boards' bylaws required all items on the agenda to be discussed prior to the board taking action.

Now, to conserve time and permit focus on non-routine matters on the agenda, many boards clump together items considered routine in nature and vote on them in one motion, or in several categorical motions. Board minutes and monthly expenses may be considered consent items. Other examples would be the approval of a minor update of a five-year plan for vocational education required by state standards, and the approval of a quarterly employment report.

Any member of the board or the superintendent can request that any item be removed from the "consent" calendar and voted upon separately, if he feels a need for discussion. Also, state law may require that some items receive separate attention.

Some districts using the consent calendar introduce consent items at one board meeting "for information only." Then, at a second meeting, those items are grouped together in an "umbrella motion" which can be presented, discussed, and acted upon expeditiously.

"Do not permit action to be taken on items submitted from the floor. Allow questions to clarify the point, but defer decisions until a future meeting, after the board and administration have had time to look at the issue and develop some kind of posture."* —*Board president, Texas

The important aspect of handling touchy questions from the floor is *follow-up*. Your board will find that speakers will be more willing to accept deferred questions if your follow-up record is good. The superintendent should keep a list of questions raised during the meeting so that he can answer them directly or place them on a future agenda. If the questions concern matters of interest to the public, the district can issue a press release or summary so that the public will be better informed the next time around. As one board member says, "This is a good way to keep the same questions from popping up again."

Update your procedures

If you find that your board meetings are not going as smoothly as you would like, it might mean that your board's meeting policies are not adequate, or are not adequately communicated. It might be time for a candid assessment of board practices and the roles played at your meetings by board members, the superintendent, staff, and the public.

Board meeting procedures and the roles people play at board meetings are in a state of transition. Fine tuning board policies to streamline the meeting process will be a giant step toward having the best board meetings possible.

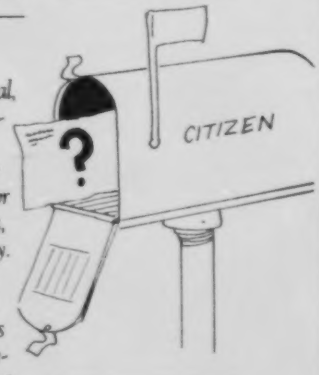
SUGGESTION

Your board might want to try this unusual, but successful, method developed for handling citizens' questions and concerns:

Make a special question card available at board meetings. The card has space for basic information, such as name, address, and organization being represented, if any. It also provides two options: The citizen may speak at the meeting or, if he's shy, has a technical question, or would like his comment to be made privately (or anonymously), he merely writes in the comment. A box which indicates that an answer by mail would be acceptable (provided the questioner gives his name and address) is another alternative.

SUGGESTION

Broadcasting board meetings is an effective way of reaching the community. Not uncommon is a Washington board member's report that interest in his district's schools jumped dramatically when the board began televising a portion of its meetings over a local public television station. "More people come to our meetings and we get more feedback since the show began," he said. In addition to public TV, cable television and radio can provide other alternative means of reaching a varied constituency.



***"The only time you can have an effective public meeting is after 5 p.m. During the day, the public just cannot attend."* —Former president, NSBA**

INCREASING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND SUPPORT

How the public is treated at your regular board meeting can either alienate people or make them feel welcome and important. A pleasant environment, a few social amenities, and a regular method by which the public can address the board not only contribute to good decision making, but also foster good public attitudes about those decisions.

Most board members think it is important that district policies and procedures make people feel that they are a welcome part of the board meeting and the resulting decisions. They go out of their way to:

- ○ Do more than list their meeting schedule in the local newspaper. They post meeting times in public places like libraries, schools, city hall, and other community buildings. They also put meeting notices in school newsletters and letters to the home through students, ask teachers to inform citizens, and make announcements at other public meetings, such as church and PTO/PTA meetings.
- ○ Make it convenient for citizens to attend. Meetings are held in an accessible place at a time when the public can be there (usually in the evenings).
- ○ Provide ample parking outside and comfortable seating inside the meeting room.
- ○ Arrange the agenda to let citizens speak early in the meeting.
- ○ Place copies of the agenda near the doors where people can pick them up as they arrive.
- ○ Print a "Welcome to the Board Meeting" brochure that explains what the board is, what the board's responsibilities are, how members of the public can express their views, and other background information.
- ○ Arrange the room in a way that encourages the flow of discussion.
- ○ Install microphones and amplification equipment (if needed) to ensure that everyone hears the discussion.
- ○ Identify board members and the superintendent with placards that can be seen by the audience.
- ○ Assign an administrator or staff member to assist media representatives before, during, and after the meeting.
- ○ Begin and end meetings on time.
- ○ Appoint citizens to serve on advisory committees which study, research, and report on specific school problems under board consideration, and receive these reports at their meetings.

Meeting in the sunshine

> ***"We are dealing with the public's children, money, and facilities. Why should we do so in secret? We are, and should be, accountable to the people. We're representatives of the people. They have a right to know where they stand."***
> ***—Board member, Delaware***

Before the open meeting laws of the 1960's enforced open meeting requirements on board proceedings, many school board meetings were conducted in secret. This was not always intentional; the public just wasn't invited to attend.

Today, almost everything about the schools is being questioned. Boards find themselves being held accountable for everything from courses in a classroom to the overall cost of education. More and more citizens are bringing their concerns before the board and observing how decisions are being reached. This "opening up" of the board room to public scrutiny is exactly what lawmakers hoped the open meeting or Sunshine laws would do.

Although the laws have been widely legislated, it is evident that many board members are still unaware of the requirements of the law, and do not always work within it. These boards are opening themselves up for a lawsuit.

The basic requirement of open meeting laws is that legislative bodies conduct their meetings in public. What a "meeting" is, what "open" means, and what the public's rights are may be defined vaguely or specifically in your state's law. Since each state law is different, this section is intended to be a general overview of "Sunshine" requirements. Consult your board attorney for specific "dos" and "don'ts."

What constitutes a meeting?

As an elected or appointed school official, you are required to vote in public and to debate most issues in public. Open meeting laws apply when you meet in regular or special sessions, and cover board committee meetings.

Under the strictest of laws, a meeting is defined as any gathering, however informal, of two or more members of a group covered by the law. If this is how your state law has been interpreted by the courts, then you and another board member could not discuss board business over lunch—even informally. But this would be an extreme case.

A gathering becomes a meeting in most states only when a majority of the group has come together to transact business. The wording of most Sunshine laws implies that you can have a social or chance meeting and discuss school business as long as you do not reach a final agreement. However, a "chance" meeting cannot be used to circumvent the spirit of the law. In other words, you can chat about problems and issues, but you can't get together with a few members and decide how issues will be resolved in a *pro forma* public meeting.

Many superintendents, board members, and school lawyers interpret the Sunshine laws in their states to mean that informal social meetings are not prohibited by the law, unless held deliberately to evade the law. They find it helpful to define meetings in terms of intent: "Why are we getting together and does the law require that the public be involved or at least notified of what's happening?"

What advance notice is required?

Although some state Sunshine laws do not specify advance notice requirements for a regular meeting, 48 to 72 hours is standard. Usually, a notice in the local newspaper is sufficient under most statutes. Of course, all news media which request notice of your meetings should be notified.

> ***"I went to the bank and ran into a fellow board member. A few minutes later, when another board member happened to come in, the bank president commented that we now constituted a quorum....I left."***
> ***—Board member, Massachusetts***

Notification requirements often differ for special meetings, with most laws specifying at least 24 hours advance notification to board members and the press. When a board fails to complete the business of a regular or special meeting, it can adjourn the meeting to complete the business at a later time. The time for the *adjourned meeting* should be posted within 24 hours after adjournment, according to many state statutes. If the business of the board is not completed at the adjourned regular or adjourned special meeting, the board may adjourn the meeting again to another subsequent time, so long as it meets legal notice requirements.

All meeting announcements should include the time and place of the meeting, and what business will be conducted. Stating that you are going to meet to "Adopt Resolution 76-21" may be considered insufficient notification. Adequate notice needs to be more specific, such as, "Consideration of a policy for reduction in staff."

The responsibility for notifying the public usually rests with the superintendent or board chairman, but the task of posting the board meetings or calling board members is usually carried out by a board clerk or secretary.

What are proper minutes?

Some state laws require that minutes be kept for all meetings (executive or private sessions are sometimes included). These may not need to be very specific. Names of members making motions, for instance, might not need to be given. Check your state law for the recording requirements for regular, executive, and committee meetings and board workshops.

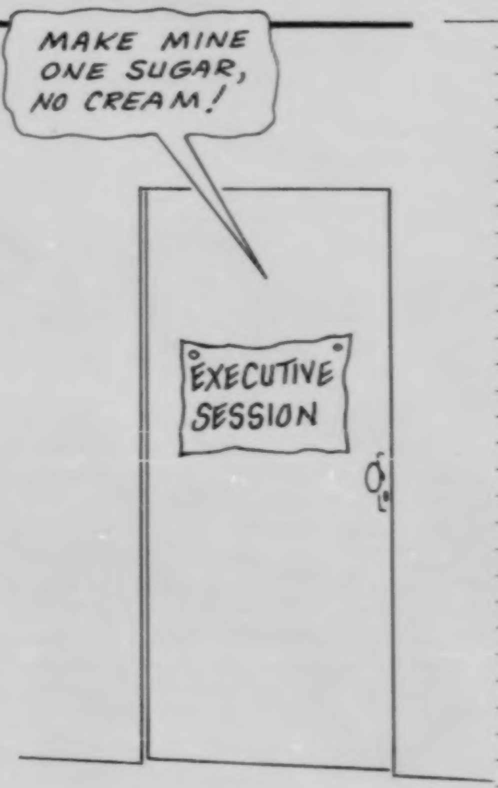
How do Sunshine laws apply to executive sessions?

Executive or "closed" sessions of the board are exempt from most open meeting laws. They can be held behind closed doors.

In executive sessions, board members can deliberate, but they cannot take a vote, and sometimes cannot even conduct an informal "straw poll." Any member can challenge the legality of a closed meeting if he feels the discussion has gone beyond the reason originally stated for it.

Although some states prohibit executive sessions for any reason, most allow closed sessions for discussing:

- ○ Selection of school sites, or the acquisition or disposal of real estate, when publicity would affect prices.


MAKE MINE ONE SUGAR, NO CREAM!
EXECUTIVE SESSION

- ○ Personnel matters.
- ○ Student disciplinary actions.
- ○ Strategy for litigation or collective bargaining negotiations.

Personnel matters include consideration of the dismissal, suspension, or discipline of a district employee. These closed sessions protect individuals from personal embarrassment or unfounded allegations. Some boards also use this general exemption to interview candidates for the superintendent's job, evaluate the superintendent, and to evaluate staff members.

Your state may stipulate additional conditions. The person being charged or investigated may have the right to be present at an executive session, or he may have the right to request that the meeting be open. A student may have the right to be present with his parents or guardians, and legal counsel.

Usually, consultations between the board and its attorney on *pending* legal matters or litigation that can have a detrimental financial impact on the district can be conducted in private. Also, most states exempt part or all of the collective bargaining process.

Some boards generally move into executive session at the time of a regular board meeting. This almost always

"We used to sit and debate an issue with someone in the audience. Sometimes the meeting would get out of control, with each of us arguing with each other. We've finally put an end to most of this. We've learned that it's easier for all concerned if we listen politely, express our awareness or concern, and let the speaker know that the board or the superintendent will get back to them with some kind of response."
—Board member, Missouri

The public is watching you.

arouses suspicion in the minds of the citizens present, so many boards find it wise to state *why* they are going into closed session, and that this action is consistent with the law. A better approach might be to hold executive sessions *prior* to the regular public meeting.

How does Sunshine apply to the press?

The Sunshine laws have particular implications for how your district deals with the press. It's important to:

- ○ Give reporters adequate back-up material (in advance of the meeting, if possible), unless the information is confidential.
- ○ Make sure there's a procedure for informing the press about all meetings, and that someone is responsible for carrying it out.
- ○ Think twice before you meet in closed session. Let the press know why you are closing the meeting. If you can't justify it to them, maybe you can't justify it at all.

How does it apply to the public?

It should be remembered that open meeting laws require that the board deliberate and act in public. They do *not*, however, require public *participation* in debate, and certainly don't require a survey of the audience on each agenda item.

Some boards go beyond Sunshine law requirements by setting aside some portion of every meeting as an open forum for the public. Many boards try to make it as easy as possible for citizens to attend and to take part in their meetings, sometimes allowing room for the public to speak both at the beginning and towards the end of the agenda.

How does Sunshine affect you?

What Sunshine means to you personally is that you need to have a certain "mindset" about your role as a board member, both in and outside the board room. You need to be aware that the public watches you, and you need to be direct in the way you work with the public.

Some board members feel that strict open meeting requirements are detrimental to their effectiveness. "It's ridiculous and hampering," said a 22-year veteran of an urban district. "As long as the ultimate vote is made in public, I don't think the public's 'right to know' need include deliberations that need to be as frank as possible.... The press disagrees, of course."

Another board member lamented: "An open meeting favors simple formulations over complicated ones, and the loudmouth over the reflective, private person. An open meeting is more likely to generate confrontation than compromise, inaction than action. In the Sunshine, good ideas may go unstated because people are afraid to propose half-formed ideas in public."

Regardless of how you feel about the open meeting law and working within it, you must abide by it.

What happens if you violate the law?

While the goal of Sunshine laws is to create an atmosphere of openness, not to punish people who have made an honest mistake, in some states criminal charges can be brought against the entire board or against you as an individual. An injunction can be obtained to stop groups from meeting illegally. Board actions which are taken at secret meetings can be nullified by court order.

"It's as if you're in a fish bowl. Overcoming this feeling may be easier if you recognize that public deliberations help ensure that all board actions will be in the public interest."
—Board member, Maryland

The rules that count (observing rules of order)

Few board members adhere to a literal and legalistic interpretation of rules of order. But the fact is, these rules can go a long way in helping boards put some order to their decision-making process.

Parliamentary rules, centuries old, are steeped in experience and tradition. They outline all the commonly accepted meeting procedures, including the introduction of new and old business, debate and disposition of motions, creation and uses of committees, and election of officers.

It is important *not* to let the rules themselves dominate a meeting, but it is necessary for a board to adopt some basic rules for its operations. It's important, too, that you—as a member of a board—understand the basic principles of parliamentary procedures and how these work on your board.

Basic parliamentary principles

Keeping the following principles in mind might help you and your board have meetings that are more effective and perhaps more enjoyable:

- Encourage full, fair, and orderly discussion by all members of all issues that concern the board.
- Maintain order by debating one subject at a time, and keeping the remarks of each speaker germane to the pending question.
- Acknowledge that every rule has a reason, therefore every motion is debatable or not, amendable or not. *Example:* A motion to limit debate is not debatable because to debate it defeats the purpose of the motion.
- Members of an assembly should not interrupt one another.
- The majority rules, but not because it is always correct. It rules because of time constraints. If unrestricted discussion were allowed for all group members of differing views, it is likely that many important decisions could not be made within a practical period of time.
- The rights of the minority must be protected. A minority of one-third plus one can block suspension of the rules and block motions designed to limit or close debate. A minority of even one member may request division of a question that has more than one part, as well as division of the house to determine affirmative and negative votes on a measure.
- During deliberations, motions must be seconded, the premise being that the time of the assembly should not be taken for topics that do not command the sympathetic interest of at least two members.

"When I first came to the board, the best advice someone gave me was, 'Don't get hung up on parliamentary procedures.... Procedures are important, but they shouldn't obscure substantive issues under discussion.'" —Board member, Wyoming

Basic parliamentary procedures

If you have a basic understanding of the following rules, you should feel comfortable in any meeting you go to as a board member:

To bring a motion before the board. You can bring your business before the board by making a motion, which is a formal proposal for the board to take action. The motion may itself be the subject of the action, or may follow the presentation of a report or recommendation.

To make the motion, say, "Mr. President, I *move* that we postpone this decision." Your wording of the motion becomes the official statement of the proposal. You also can present important or complex items that have been prepared before the meeting in the form of a resolution: "I move the adoption of the following resolution: Be it resolved that..."

"The longer you serve on a board, the more you come to value the rules of order that at first feel so awkward and pretentious." —Board member, Rhode Island

"I've never gaveled another board member or citizen in order to cut debate. It's best to let them talk for awhile—even if they're disruptive—then thank them politely for their contribution to the discussion, and end it there." —Board president, Washington

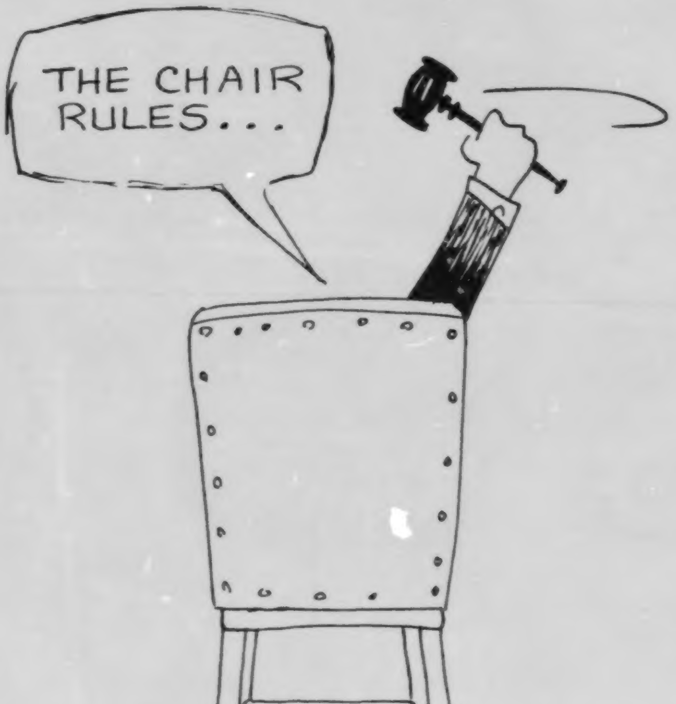
"Will whoever's saying 'Jeepers' care to put that into a motion?"

After you make a motion, the rules of order call for another member to second it. The member who seconds the motion need not necessarily favor it. The chair then states the question and the debate begins.

To debate and vote. Your debate can be informal, but it should deal strictly with the question at hand. A time limit may be placed on presentations. When the debate appears to be over, the chair asks if the board is ready for a vote. He can ask for a voice vote, show of hands, or roll call vote. He then announces the result.

The superintendent is entitled to take part in the board's discussion and to present suggestions and recommendations, but he does not vote.

To entertain a motion. Since only one question can be considered at a time, once someone makes a motion, the board must either adopt it, reject it, table it, or dispose of it in some other way before moving on to any other business. Accordingly, you or any other board member cannot interrupt consideration of one motion to discuss another matter or make another main motion.


THE CHAIR RULES...

Subsidiary motions are those you make to dispose of a motion in a way other than by vote. Anyone can move to postpone a motion indefinitely. This can be an indirect rejection of the main motion. If you think a motion should be reworded, you can move to amend it. You can turn the motion over to a committee for further study, by *committing* the main question. If you want to withhold consideration of a motion for a later meeting—or for a later time in the same meeting—you can move to postpone to a certain time. If you want to put a pending question aside because something more urgent has arisen, you can *lay the motion on the table*.

Knowing basic parliamentary procedure is necessary for all board members. Some boards depend solely on the chair to keep order. Others designate a parliamentarian who has a special responsibility to advise the chair on procedural questions. Remember the words of one board colleague, "Keeping the order is no minor responsibility. Without it, major board responsibilities cannot be met."

AN AGENDA FORMAT THAT DOUBLES AS A RECORD KEEPER

Many districts use an agenda format that can double as a record of board action on agenda items. The example on the next page will help you design a complete agenda which can make it possible for your board to:

- ○ Eliminate much clerical time usually necessary for typing and preparing the agenda and minutes.
- ○ Produce comprehensive and accurate minutes of board meetings that exceed most minimum requirements stipulated by state laws.
- ○ Make minutes available for distribution within two working hours following adjournment of the scheduled meeting.
- ○ Have an automatically up-to-date master index of all board meetings.

MINUTES

PUBLIC MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION ABC UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

(Abridged)

	Dr. George Walton	Ms. Judy Holly	Mr. Ralph Brown	Mrs. Clara Smith	Mr. John Doe	AGENDA ITEM	ACTION AUTHORIZED BY BOARD
Present	X	X	X	X	X	ATTENDANCE AT THIS REGULAR PUBLIC MEETING (Board members who arrive after the meeting begins will be noted as "Present" at the point in this agenda at which they arrive.)	
						A. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE	
						B. INVOCATION	
Motion				X		C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES	
Second					X	These minutes of a meeting of the Board of Education of the ABC Unified School District were approved as to the legality and form by the SCHOOL ATTORNEY on (June 17, 1982) and approved and adopted by the BOARD OF EDUCATION on (June 17, 1982).	Approval minutes
Ayes	X	X	X	X	X		
Nays							
Abstain							
Motion					X	D. ADOPTION OF CONSENT CALENDAR	
Second			X			Action by the Board of Education in "Adoption of Consent Calendar" at this point of the agenda means that all items appearing in this agenda have asterisks (*) in the right-hand column (which items constitute the "consent calendar") are adopted by one single motion, unless a member of the Board or the superintendent requests that any such item be removed from the "consent calendar" and voted upon separately. *(Note: Routine agenda items would be listed as subcategories of this item. Items requiring discussion would follow as "E," "F," etc.)*	Approval and adopt Consent Calendar
Ayes	X	X	X	X	X		
Nays							
Abstain							

A minute on minutes

If your board tends to regard the approval of minutes as an irrelevant chore, reconsider. Your board's minutes are the main channel of communication from the board to school personnel and the public. They also are the only legal record of your meetings. As one school attorney said, "Minutes may have the force of law and should be treated as if they will some day appear in court.... It's quite possible that they may."

In your district, the board clerk, secretary, or superintendent may be responsible for recording the proceedings. Your board may find it wise to employ trained secretarial help to keep the minutes, so that all of those involved in board deliberations can give their full attention to the business at hand.

When taking the minutes, the secretary should sit near the board president, so that every word can be heard. If the recorder doesn't hear or understand something, he should ask the president to have it repeated. If the secretary obtains much of the pertinent information before a meeting, this will simplify note taking. *An example:* keeping a roll of the board members on hand to check their presence, absence, late arrivals, and early departures, recording the exact time of each.

"It took me HOURS to type up these MINUTES!"

Minutes should be written immediately after a meeting. If a stenographer prepares them, the board secretary or clerk should read them carefully and sign the official copy which will be included in the school district's records. Copies of the minutes should be sent to all board members as soon as they are prepared, but no later than the distribution of the next meeting's agenda. Some districts send minutes to the press and other community leaders immediately following a meeting, but all districts are required by law to make minutes available to interested citizens upon request.

Board minutes should include the following:

- Name of your school district, city, or town.
- Place and time of the meeting.
- Board members present and absent, and staff members present.
- Approval of the minutes of the preceding meeting or meetings.
- The nature of the meeting (whether it was a regular or special meeting, or adjourned regular or adjourned special meeting).
- A record of all motions adopted or disapproved by the board, together with the names of the members making and seconding motions.
- A record of the members voting "yea" and "nay," except in the case of unanimous votes and voice votes.
- A record of the disposition of all matters on which the board considered, but did not take action.
- A summary of remarks made by members of the audience.

The kind of minutes that will be the easiest to read and to glean information from will be those that summarize the meeting, and record important matters in an easily discernable way. For example, margin heads, sideheads, or paragraph heads can be used to record main motions, resolutions, votes, and decisions; and important words can be underlined throughout.

If you or members of your board want to correct or supplement the minutes before you approve them (usually at your next board meeting), you should make corrections in ink directly on the original and make additions on a separate page to be attached. Minutes should not be rewritten after they have been read, but should stand as corrected.

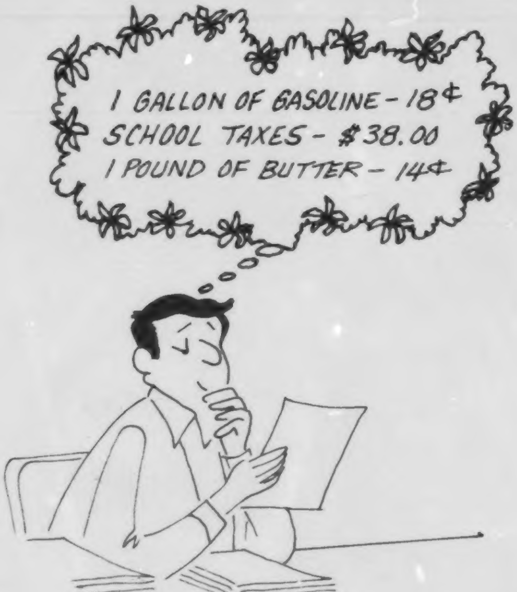
Copies of all board minutes will be kept by the board clerk or superintendent, usually under lock and key, so you may or may not want to keep your copy on file. Some board members say that keeping minutes is essential, in case they want to refer to them later. Others say this is a waste of their time and space.

"I hope you do not measure the effectiveness of board meetings, or that of the board president, by the length of meetings. The shortest is not necessarily the best."
—Board Member, Illinois

Tip: Read the minutes of past board meetings.

If you are a new board member, looking through board minutes of the past several years is a good way to gain a perspective on your district, the issues the board has dealt with, and how it has done so. You don't have to be a new board member, though, to benefit from a minute search, as one New Jersey board member discovered.

After dusting off and perusing 100 years of the ancient minutes of his board, the board member said, "My occasional trips down memory lane helped to put our problems in a new perspective. There were problems then just as there are now. I found much to chuckle over from glancing at the past, but I also became more aware of things to be proud of in the present. Our schools are doing more. We're attempting to provide every student—not just a chosen few—with a high quality education. That didn't happen in the good old days. Today at least we're trying."



"What time did that school board meeting break up last night?"

BOARD MEETINGS... LAST A LONG, LONG TIME

The conclusion of one National School Boards Association survey of over 1,000 school board members from school districts of all sizes, representing school boards in all parts of the U.S., was no surprise: *In general, school board meetings are too long.*

If your board is like most, your meetings last an average of three to four hours. Some last seven hours or more. In the NSBA survey, only 20 percent of the respondents said they get their school business finished in less than two hours.

One survey result, however, may prove somewhat of a surprise: Larger school boards (those having seven or nine members) tend to get their business accomplished in less time. Boards serving larger constituencies also reported having short meetings, but they also reported holding more meetings than do school boards serving smaller communities.

Some boards use committees or hold preliminary "committee of the whole" sessions to avoid time-consuming detail work at regular meetings. It is important to remember that committee meetings are also subject to open meeting laws, and that committees are generally not authorized to take final action on issues which must be debated and decided by the full board.

The length, then, of your board meetings will be directly affected by:

- ○ How much work has already been done at preliminary board committee sessions.
- ○ Whether or not members are prepared for the meeting.
- ○ Whether or not members monopolize discussion.
- ○ Whether or not everyone really understands the issues.
- ○ Whether or not the superintendent is prepared to make recommendations and provide background information.

THE EFFECTIVE MEETING CHECKLIST

Effective board meetings don't happen by chance. To have control of their meetings, boards should assess their current practices, agree on needed changes in these practices, and put the results on paper so everyone will know what the procedures are and what's expected.

This section is a checklist of meeting policies and practices that are considered essential ingredients of effective board meetings. You can respond to the checklist for your own information, or you and your board can use it to determine areas that need improvement.

Check the appropriate columns on the left to indicate: G = Good, A = Adequate, NI = Needs Improvement.

MEETING PREPARATION

G A NI

☐ ☐ ☐ 1. Are notices of your meetings properly posted?

☐ ☐ ☐ 2. Has the board adopted a procedure for setting the agenda and preparing back-up reports and briefings?

☐ ☐ ☐ 3. Do staff members understand which matters need to be brought to a scheduled meeting and which do not?

☐ ☐ ☐ 4. Do your board president and superintendent discuss agenda items and other business, and try to anticipate any problems that might occur?

☐ ☐ ☐ 5. Have you established policy and published procedures by which board members, school staff, citizens, and others can request that a matter be considered by the board?

☐ ☐ ☐ 6. Are matters to be acted upon previously reviewed, studied, and presented in writing to your board by the administration?

☐ ☐ ☐ 7. Does the superintendent specify in advance those items for which he has a recommended action? Are these accompanied by his recommendations, a list of pros and cons, and alternatives when feasible?

☐ ☐ ☐ 8. Are new issues for the board's attention channeled through the agenda development procedure and not brought up for the first time at board meetings?

☐ ☐ ☐ 9. Are your meetings held in pleasant and comfortable surroundings which are conducive to effective communication and decision making? (check applicable items)
   - ☐ Chairs are in proper repair?
   - ☐ Lighting is well adjusted?
   - ☐ Room temperature is controlled?
   - ☐ All electrical equipment—projectors, tape recorders, microphones, and amplifiers—is in working order?
   - ☐ Water or other beverage is provided for board members?
   - ☐ If smoking is allowed, ashtrays are provided?
   - ☐ The board policy book is available for reference if necessary?
   - ☐ A book on parliamentary procedure is available for use?
   - ☐ A gavel has been provided for the chairman?
   - ☐ Adequate seating is provided for the audience?
   - ☐ All board members have good audio and visual contact with the audience, speakers, and each other?
   - ☐ Board members have name plates that are visible to the audience?
   - ☐ Arrangements are made for the press?

☐ ☐ ☐ 10. Are reporters briefed about what will happen at the meeting?

☐ ☐ ☐ 11. Do board members come to meetings well prepared?

☐ ☐ ☐ 12. If your board has committees, are committee reports or minutes distributed to all members of the board?

☐ ☐ ☐ 13. Is the board attorney asked to attend when important legal matters are on the agenda?

☐ ☐ ☐ 14. Are all members of the public, especially those involved or interested in agenda items, invited to attend your meetings and made to feel welcome?

☐ ☐ ☐ 15. Has the board established an orderly method for the public, including students, to speak at board meetings?

☐ ☐ ☐ 16. Does the superintendent invite staff or specialists to your meetings to supply back-up advice and knowledge on recommended proposals?

☐ ☐ ☐ 17. If the recording secretary for the board meeting is not available, is an immediate substitute always on call?

☐ ☐ ☐ 18. Does each administrator who is to make a report to the board have a substitute in case of emergencies?

☐ ☐ ☐ 19. Is there a plan for cancelling or postponing a board meeting on short notice, because of bad weather or other emergency?

☐ ☐ ☐ 20. Has adequate parking and security been provided for vehicles of all those who attend board meetings?

☐ ☐ ☐ 21. Is there adequate meeting space selected and prepared for meeting in executive session?

MEETING CONDUCT

☐ ☐ ☐ 22. Do your board meetings start on time?

☐ ☐ ☐ 23. During the meeting, does the board president pay attention to the clock so that adequate time can be devoted to important matters?

☐ ☐ ☐ 24. Are agendas distributed to members of the audience so they can follow board action?

☐ ☐ ☐ 25. Does the board president clarify or explain each agenda item?

☐ ☐ ☐ 26. During the meeting, is only one person permitted to speak at a time?

☐ ☐ ☐ 27. Are speaking privileges granted through the recognition by the chair?

☐ ☐ ☐ 28. Is board discussion confined to the issue on the floor, and is non-pertinent discussion ruled out-of-order?

☐ ☐ ☐ 29. Is the board president adept at summarizing arguments before bringing matters to a vote?

☐ ☐ ☐ 30. Does the board stick to the agenda?

☐ ☐ ☐ 31. Are all board members provided an opportunity to express their views on issues?

☐ ☐ ☐ 32. Are issues before the board resolved unless postponed, committed, or tabled pending further study?

☐ ☐ ☐ 33. Are issues brought before the board for the first time by residents, students, or staff referred back to the administration for investigation and a recommendation for action?

☐ ☐ ☐ 34. If the board goes into executive session, is a reason announced which is consistent with open meeting laws?

☐ ☐ ☐ 35. Do meetings end on time?

AFTER THE MEETING

☐ ☐ ☐ 36. Are clear, concise minutes sent promptly to all board members?

☐ ☐ ☐ 37. Is a report synopsizing board action published to the press, school staff and interested citizens?

☐ ☐ ☐ 38. Do the administration and board follow up on questions that have been deferred to another time?

Note: *For many boards, there will be no need to formalize all of these procedures, especially if the board has always operated in such a manner. But, as new board members come on, they must be made aware of the rules. Keep in mind that if you're from a small district, your board might not need all the rules presented. They should be considered and adopted by your board to meet its needs.*

"Say, Joe, would you mind being my stand-in at the school board meeting tonight? Something has come up at home."

MEETINGS, MEETINGS: DECIDING WHICH ONES TO ATTEND

A board member could spend 24 hours a day attending regular meetings, committee meetings, public hearings, and all the many school-related meetings and activities. When asked how they decide which meetings or activities are necessary to attend to fulfill their responsibilities and be effective, experienced board members gave the following advice:

- Attend all regularly scheduled meetings and public hearings. They should have first priority.
- Decide which areas of education you are most interested in and attend meetings which focus on these areas.
- If you can't go, arrange for some other board member to attend. Let your stand-in brief you on what happened, and make sure you obtain the minutes or a report of the meeting.
- Attend only those meetings to which you can contribute or at which you can learn something important to your board service.
- You can safely avoid meetings dealing with administrative topics.

Are you a purse-string holder?

WHAT NOT TO *BE* AT BOARD MEETINGS

Even a well-planned board meeting with a strong chairman, a good agenda, and rules of order can be frustrated by the following types of board members:

The Publicity Seeker...who uses the meeting to make flashy or controversial statements which will make the news, and looks at the reporters while saying them.

The Politico...who uses the meeting as a forum for building or enhancing his political career.

The Purse-String Holder...who is only on the board to keep down school costs and repeats this refrain at board meetings, regardless of the consequences for children and the schools.

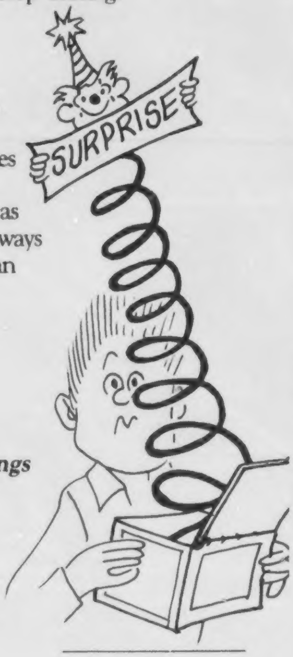
The Leave-it-to-the-Superintendent Advocate...who is unwilling or unable to contribute a layman's wisdom to board discussions and wants to resolve all issues by shunting them to the superintendent.

The Nay Sayer...who isn't for *anything* anyone else advocates or endorses.

WHAT *YOU* CAN DO TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR BOARD MEETINGS

As an individual member of your board, you're not in control of the board meeting, but there are some things you can do to make the most of them. Here are some tips from your school board colleagues:

- Do your homework. When you get the agenda and back-up materials, read them and be prepared to contribute to the discussion. Plan your questions in advance and jot them down before coming to the meeting.
- If you do not get the information you need, check with the superintendent or your board president before the meeting.
- Try to know in advance what is expected of you. Be prepared to make any presentation expected.
- Organize your papers before arriving at the board room. Bring everything you need.
- Arrive on time.
- Keep the board agenda and objectives in mind.
- Don't spring any "surprises" on the board.
- If you're unprepared, don't fake it. If others are obviously unprepared, but are debating the issues anyway, try to cut them off as diplomatically as possible (a motion to table is one method).
- Work to reach agreement on the issues and come to a decision. If the discussion gets bogged down, try to summarize and encourage action.
- Avoid having a hidden agenda—saying one thing and meaning another.
- Avoid espousing personal philosophies at length.
- Don't attack personalities, attack problems.
- Keep your eyes open. If, in mid-sentence (or mid-argument), you realize that everybody around you is either glaring at you, blushing for you, or packing up to go home, take the hint and stop talking.
- Don't dominate discussions.
- Broaden your concerns. No matter what special interest group encouraged your election or appointment, once on the board, you should cast your votes according to your conscience. Vote with the knowledge that, as a board member, you almost always know more sides of an issue than your constituents do.
- Do not debate issues with members of the audience.



Surprises at board meetings are no fun.

Sounding out board hearings

"The heart of any hearing is an impartial decision maker."
—Board member, South Dakota

- The parents of a child needing special services do not agree with the decision made by the superintendent to place the child in a special class.
- A school principal has given notice to a student and his parents that the student is to be expelled, and the parents protest.
- A teacher feels his rights have been violated.
- A group of citizens wants the district to provide adult education classes.
- The board is about to adopt a budget and a new tax assessment rate.
- The board announces its intent to close an elementary school.

Depending on state law, board policy, negotiated agreements, and the issue at hand, school boards hold public and private (open and closed) hearings on issues that are too complex or controversial to be discussed at a regular board meeting. In some states, boards are required by law to hold public hearings on matters such as the budget and the tax rate. On other matters, school employees, members of the community (sometimes by a vote by a certain percentage of the citizenry), or a majority of the board can petition for a hearing.

"These days, it isn't enough for board members to give blanket approval to the decisions made by administrators within the school district hierarchy. They must examine facts on their own when they are petitioned for a hearing."
—Board member, Indiana

The main intent of such hearings is to provide for a fair and adequate forum and to minimize the possiblity of the board making ill-advised, illegal, or improper rulings in absence of adequate information and study.

Hearing procedures

Most boards have in writing general procedures for establishing and conducting public or private hearings. But the exact nature of a hearing varies depending on the circumstances of the particular case. Personnel matters, for example, or those involving student disciplinary actions, are "quasi-judicial" proceedings which require more formal procedures than do matters of public concern, such as establishing the tax rate, or deciding to provide sex education or to close a school. These latter types of hearings are often called "legislative" or "fact-finding" hearings.

Tips for hearing public issues

Public hearings are unlike the citizen forums provided for at board meetings because they usually are restricted to one issue. They provide a school board with direct and extensive citizen input on that issue.

As one Connecticut superintendent explained: "The school board schedules a public hearing to garner additional community input before adopting its annualized statement of goals and objectives. This procedure provides the school board with broader insights into citizen concerns and the means by which those concerns can best be dealt with."

Although public hearings do provide for public input, holding public hearings is not something most boards like to do too often.

To cut down on the number of hearings they hold, some boards use a *review process*. The review process is initiated by the superintendent when a school-community problem is brought to his attention for action or resolution.

According to one board's policy, the purpose of the review is to gather pertinent information about a school-community problem from all available

"At stake is the school district's reputation for objectivity and fairness, as reflected by the care and manner in which board hearings are held."
—Board member, Indiana

THIS HEARING HAS BEEN CALLED TO ESTABLISH A NEW SCHOOL TAX . . .
ARRRGGHH!
. . . RATE!

sources, and to make every effort to resolve that problem within the laws and policies already established. Once this is done, a report of the problem, the findings, and recommendations for action is made to the board. Then, if the problem is not resolved to the satisfaction of those concerned, or if the board chooses, the board will initiate a *hearing*.

In holding a public hearing, many of the same strategies and procedures a board uses to manage its regular meetings will work, but because of the usually intense or controversial subject matter of public hearings, maintaining board room decorum can be more of a challenge than that presented at regular meetings.

How can boards keep public hearings from turning into circuses? Here are some tips:

- ○ Be sure the meeting is well publicized. (Don't give people an excuse to say they didn't know about the meeting.)
- ○ The room should be arranged so that people feel they are a part of the action, but the board also should try to maintain an "impersonal board presence." Board members don't want to be personally attacked, nor do they want to appear inaccessible.
- ○ Let it be known that only the issue at hand will be discussed.
- ○ Have materials on the topic available, if possible.
- ○ The ground rules for the hearing should be stated at the start, either by the superintendent or the board chairman.
- ○ The audience should know that the purpose of the hearing is for the board to come to an understanding of the community's views, but that no decision will be made at the hearing.
- ○ Time limits should be set for each speaker. The meeting itself should last no longer than three hours, since that's about as long as anybody will have the patience for.
- ○ If the board already has an official position on the issue, it's best to announce the reasons for this position at the beginning of the meeting. If the board has not yet made an official decision, the board president can say so, and summarize briefly the arguments for and against the issue to be decided—*before* listening to speakers for and against the issue.
- ○ Once members of the audience begin to speak, the board members should give their undivided attention to them. The board should have someone keep a tally of the comments on each side of an issue, but remember that the people attending the hearing may not represent the *total* community.
- ○ Keep notes and take names so that the board, through the superintendent, can get back to the people who asked specific questions.
- ○ Individual board members should not speak until the audience has run out of time. This eliminates cross-conversation and arguments. The board is not there to debate. There should be a limit placed on the amount of time each board member speaks, but each should have the chance to speak.
- ○ The president should speak last; then advise members of the audience that their comments will be taken into consideration; and, if possible, give the date of the board meeting at which a vote on the issue will be taken.

Board members participating in a public hearing should remember: "Don't take it personally." Matters that are discussed in public hearings are destined to stir emotions—not only the public's, but those of board members.

"It's pretty easy for things to get out of hand. If you have a heckler in the audience, chances are someone's going to lose his cool and heckle back. It's a circus, but it's not fun. The board usually ends up looking like clowns."
—Director of public relations, Michigan

Even though you and your colleagues speak sincerely, sometimes the public will not accept your explanations. Community groups might leave fuming, plotting new strategies, which may include demonstrations or even a lawsuit. In turn, the board and administration may feel equally angry. You will feel you have done your jobs well, and you will resent opposition. One board member having experienced this said, "I am a bruised, battered, and confused politician."

If you come through a hearing on a hot issue and have such sentiments, know that you're not alone. No one ever said calling the shots for a school district is easy.

Tips for holding special hearings

A board should have separate policies and procedures for judicial types of hearings, such as those relating to student suspension, staff dismissal, or placements for handicapped children. There are some general guidelines that apply to these "court-like" hearings in-

Handle hearsay with caution.

"You should hold your hearings by using as much decorum and respect as would be used in a regular hearing before a state court of records." —Board member, Michigan

volving the rights of individuals and due process.

Foremost, most experts agree that a *board should not hear matters that can or should be solved by the administration*. Depending on your state law, many types of hearings can be handled by the superintendent or other administrators. One of the key requirements is that a "final" decision be made at some level, since the "last word" ruling of the school system must be made before most courts will entertain an appeal or lawsuit. The interested party, whether a student, teacher, or other person, has a right to a hearing procedure that ends in such a final decree.

If the members of a board do sit as judges (a quorum must be present) they should be careful to *maintain their impartiality and to avoid rumors and unfounded allegations*. In due process hearings, only evidence received and testimony heard should be considered when making a determination.

To maintain its impartiality, a board should not receive information from the superintendent or any other person outside the hearing room. Such ex *parte* communication can prejudice the rights of persons affected by the board's decision, and can cause a hearing decision to be overruled by a court. In numerous court cases dealing with teacher suspension and other serious issues, it has been held that if evidence was disclosed or the case informally discussed with the board prior to the formal hearing, due process was denied.

As the time for making a decision approaches, board members often are tempted to seek out information on their own that is related to the matter at hand. This should be avoided, since the decision of the board *must* be based on the hearing proceedings only. Members of the board should preserve their neutrality until they have heard all sides in a formal presentation.

There are many laws and policies that will direct how your board conducts hearings. Your state school boards association can give you specifics on these. Consulting your school attorney is a *must* when developing policy establishing hearing procedures.

No laws or policy can possibly cover every detail of every case in question. At some point, your own discretion and reasoned opinion must dominate and be coupled with prudent judgment. Undoubtedly, there will be cases where individualization of justice is the only answer. As William Blake once counseled, "One law for the lion and the ox is oppression."

Like public officials serving other areas of society, you will be expected to function in a discretionary manner whenever your power permits you the freedom to move outside the limitations imposed by law and policy.

Also, when you're sitting in judgment, your manner and speech should acknowledge the dignity of other participants, as well as cast a favorable light on the reputation of the school district. No one should use any language that would demean anyone or any portion of the hearing.

This statement by former Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis probably captures best the basic philosophy for board hearings: "If we desire respect for the law, we must first make the law respectable."

4

EXERCISING BOARD LEADERSHIP

"We're not questioning your leadership ability, Glitz! Just get rid of that silly hat!"

***"Board members need the kind of vision that will prepare their systems for the future."* —Board member, New York**

***"Local school boards, if they are to retain local and lay control, must anticipate tomorrow and devise educational policy goals that take into account the various alternative futures that face them."* —Board member, Minnesota**

In a nationally televised speech, former President Jimmy Carter made a telling confession. He admitted that during a Camp David meeting, one visitor told him, "Mr. President, you're not leading this nation; you're just managing the government."

Regrettably, if that Camp David visitor were to visit the "average" school board meeting, he might very well conclude that school boards are little different from Mr. Carter. They stay bogged down in the details of managing the schools and devote little time to leading them. The reasons are apparent: It's easier and safer to decide the color of paint for the new gym than to decide the purposes for that gym.

What is leadership?

It's common to think of leadership in terms of leadership characteristics, rather than in terms of leadership processes. If you were asked to define a "true leader," you might easily list a host of personal qualities. You might say that a leader has charisma; or that leaders are born; or that a leader must be a good listener. You might also believe that people follow a leader because he walks in step, or because he's one step ahead of everyone else.

If you are asked to describe what makes an *organization* a leader, you probably will have to think for a few minutes. Your first thought might be that if the organization is near the top

***"A leader is anyone who has two characteristics. First, he is going someplace; second, he is able to persuade others to go with him."* —W.H. Cowley**

"The community elects its best, its most moral people to make tough policy decisions. It does not elect school board members to buy nuts and bolts."
—Board member, Wisconsin

of the Fortune 500, it is a leader. You might overlook the less apparent characteristics that enable an organization to be a leader; for example, effective goal setting by its board of directors.

Leadership for school boards

It has been said that a board *gives*, *shows*, and *assumes* leadership at various times, within both the school system and in the community. It gives leadership when it responds to situations, shows leadership through its actions, and assumes leadership when it determines a course of action or decides to move in a certain direction.

A board exercises leadership within the school system when its members can combine their talents to:

- Set common goals congruent with community needs and desires.
- Place priorities on those goals.
- Enact fair, workable, and well thought-out policies.
- Authorize educational programs to meet students' needs.
- Hire competent and capable personnel.
- Evaluate board and district efforts.

In the community, board members exercise leadership when they help inform citizens about the schools' accomplishments, problems, and needs. Through their actions, board leaders represent the community and help foster understanding and support for the schools.

Board members often speak of leadership in terms of initiating change. As one Minnesota board leader put it: "If school boards are not to become mired down in a process of purely reacting to change, perhaps even on a month-to-month basis, they must begin to examine how they can anticipate and actually prepare for change."

Put in simpler terms, it means dealing less with the "what is," and grappling more with "what if."

Effectively dealing with the "what ifs" requires that the members of a board have the basic skills necessary for organizational leadership. While not the total answer, the techniques suggested in this chapter should help you and your board colleagues increase your leadership effectiveness.

"Board leadership is being an enabler rather than a regulator; a catalyst for candid discussion and positive change; a planning agency that helps the public decide what it wants its schools to accomplish."
—Board member, New Jersey

"Unless the board is establishing long-term plans and direction for the schools, it's questionable whether it is in control. The question is, 'Is the board reacting or planning?'"
—Board member, Arkansas

"It all began when I tried to grapple with the 'what ifs'."

A NOTE ABOUT CHANGE

While a great deal of board leadership involves bringing about some change, there are times when responsible leadership means controlling change.

The members of your board may represent two distinct types of leaders: *activists*, who establish leadership by promoting educational change; and *reactivists*, who seek to lead by resisting major changes. Each plays an important role.

School systems and public school management must change to prepare students to live in a fast-changing world. Today, change is attractive for many people who equate "new" with "better." Board leaders must prevent their school systems from being overrun by excessive demands for change and by unnecessary changes.

A psychologist who works with public schools in central Texas says that boards should view their school districts as "a human service system that is fueled by the collective energies of its staff." In other words, schools can accomplish their goals only so far as the teachers, administrators, students, and staff have the energy to accomplish them.

Says the psychologist, "Once the demand for performance exceeds the limitations of human energy, the outcome is predictable. Overtaxed people and organizations become counterproductive, anxiety and anger contribute to conflict. This conflict hurts communication, makes decision making difficult, and eventually cuts into the opportunity of children to learn."

The types of change that deplete staff energies include: starting something new (like a new program or learning to work with a new principal); stopping a program or activity; increasing the frequency or complexity of an activity; or decreasing the frequency or complexity of an activity.

When contemplating her role in bringing change to her district, one board member observed, "We shouldn't be at the forefront of innovation for innovation's sake. We need to move cautiously so we'll have more successes."

When looking at the need for change, another board member suggested asking:

○ Where is it coming from?

○ What brought about the desire for change?

○ Do the people who say they want change really understand its effect on the entire district?

When your board is promoting change, keep in mind that people don't necessarily resist change itself—they resist the way change is presented to them.

Goal setting

". . . and do you, Constance, as a school board member, vow to organize an open system for setting goals this school year?"

Nearly two thousand years ago, Seneca, the Roman philosopher, explained the importance of setting goals: "When a man does not know what harbor he is making for, no wind is the right wind." Put another way, "Every wind is the right wind."

Until only a few years ago, goal setting and long-range planning was something done mostly by school administrators. However, more and more board members are now convinced that if they want something to happen, they need to formally establish it as a goal and instruct the administration to plan for achieving that goal. As one Iowa educator explains: "A school system can raise test scores, improve public relations, develop a program for gifted and talented students, or even close an elementary school with a minimum of emotional backlash from constituents. What it takes to accomplish these wonders is an organized, open system for setting goals."

Some basic definitions

Goals are statements of purpose and direction. They serve to identify standards to be maintained where change is to occur and to define the boundaries of that change. They are the results

"Unless a board is constantly studying, society's system will continue educating children more fitted for life in the early part of this century than for the challenging world of the twenty-first century."
—Board member, Alaska

"One of our most difficult problems is an unwillingness or inability to set clear, measurable, and enforceable goals for the schools."
—Board member, Florida

your board hopes to achieve in order to eliminate a problem or meet a need.

Priorities are your most important goals. Boards set priorities by deciding which goals will get the most time, attention, and money. Although money is often a key factor, some boards try to avoid the funding issue until after they set their priorities.

Objectives are the support tasks which must be successfully completed in order to accomplish a given goal. Objectives sometimes are called "targets," "milestones," or "strategies." They usually are developed by the administration, sometimes approved by the board, and often written with a price tag attached.

Types of goals

There are long-term goals (usually about 5 or 10 years), which are somewhat idealistic, but essential to a forward perspective. They place the current and future years' operation in a broader context. Short-range goals (one or two years) are the critical components in moving a school district on a realistic pathway.

There also are community, board, and individual goals. Community goals are the mammoth ones, encompassing concepts beyond what individual board members can do within their terms of office. Board goals are usually more focused. They examine what a board can achieve within a given time frame—usually one or two years.

"Goals help direct the staff and help the board know where the staff is going and how long it will take them to get there."
—Board member, Oregon

An example of a community goal might be: "To provide for accountability in the use of the district's buildings, facilities, and equipment in order to ensure a proper learning environment for every student." Its board-goal counterpart might be: "To establish a comprehensive policy for use of school buildings for educational programs and community activities." Your individual goals may or may not match those of your community or board, so you might need to compromise, negotiate, or rethink some of your ideas in order that the board and community can agree on and pursue common goals.

Why set goals?

As noted earlier, setting goals is the process by which a school board exercises leadership. If your board doesn't set goals, others will establish goals for it. Teachers' unions, PTA's, political organizations, and other special interest groups are quite willing to fill a leadership vacuum.

WHY SET GOALS?

Well defined goals provide the basis for:

- ○ Policy making.
- ○ Setting priorities.
- ○ Planning programs.
- ○ Good communication among the board, superintendent, staff, students, and the community.
- ○ Periodic evaluation.
- ○ Accountability.

By setting goals, the board establishes a basic framework for administrative action. When goals are not specified by the board, school administrators are likely to form their own goals, a situation which often leads to conflict with the board.

Setting board goals helps members of the board get on the same wavelength. Sharing goals and priorities helps them define differences, develop compromises, and make group commitments.

"A board shouldn't wait for administrators to set goals. It should emphasize its own concerns and its own priorities."
—Board member, Louisiana

A goal setting process

The process of goal setting can be narrowed to three major phases:

- ○ Assessing: "Where are you now?"
- ○ Projecting: "Where do you want to be?" and "When?"
- ○ Implementing: Designing action plans to narrow the gap between where you are and where you want to be.

Assessing and projecting. Most boards begin the goal-setting process with a needs assessment. A thorough needs assessment is an effective tool for:

- ○ Examining and evaluating routine school activities and operations.
- ○ Identifying priority educational needs.

"About your idea of assessing and projecting, Mrs. Glitz...."

- Reconsidering the district's existing educational philosophy and goals.
- Involving community residents in the development of educational plans and policies that affect the schools.
- Demonstrating the concern of the board and staff for the continued evaluation and improvement of the school system.
- Collecting valuable information that will help board members and administrators plan and allocate revenues for a variety of programs and projects.

Needs assessment deals with both subjective and objective data. Attitudes, values, expectations, and opinions held by the groups and individuals involved often are as important as the ratio of administrators to teachers, or the fact that one school building is more than half empty.

> ***"Participants in the needs assessment process should include administrators, teaching staff, students, and community members."***
> ***—Board member, Utah***

Panel discussions, questionnaires, community forums, and even games have been used as vehicles for needs assessment. Numerous needs assessment instruments have been developed for school systems by state departments of education, state school boards associations, schools of public school administration, Phi Delta Kappa, and others. The National School Boards Association and the American Association of School Administrators have an assessment instrument in a booklet titled, *Self Evaluation of School Boards*.

Some of these instruments seek to identify specific needs, such as the need for staff development, for career education, or for opening a new school. The National School Boards Association sponsors an Educational Goals Assessment service to help school districts identify what the community thinks students should learn, what it thinks the schools should teach, and where the community wants to put its resources.

There also are instruments to assess general school goals and objectives. These focus on curriculum, transportation, facilities, pupil services, support services, community involvement, personnel, and board policies and procedures. Such instruments often ask respondents to indicate whether a specific goal is a high, moderate, or low priority; and whether that goal or need is being met, being partially met, or not being met at all.

The key to a successful needs assessment, as with goal setting as a whole, is involvement by all who will be affected by the results. So, whether a district decides to adapt a "ready-made" needs assessment instrument, or to develop one from scratch, the goal statements that are listed should be reviewed and agreed upon by the board and representatives of the entire school community prior to its distribution. Then, a cross section of the community should be asked to respond to the statements. The results of the needs assessment need not be reported directly to all participants. However, everyone should be able to see the results in the form of board-approved goals and priorities.

A plan for conducting a comprehensive needs assessment might look like this:

- The school board adopts the general plan to conduct the needs assessment. Approximate time: two months, including pre-planning.
- Staff is oriented to the plan for conducting the needs assessment. This is done simultaneously with the selection and orientation of a needs assessment committee, if one is to be used. Approximate time: one to two months.

> ***"There is a tremendous give and take between the board and the administration when we set our yearly goals."***
> ***—Board member, Iowa***

- Staff (committee) undertakes preliminary activities. These might include a group process workshop in which board members, school administrators, community members, students, and teachers work together to define the major needs of the school system; the development and distribution of short-form surveys to the community, staff, students, recent graduates, area employers, local institutions of post high school education, and others; interviews; and a review of school data, such as achievement scores, attendance records, dropout rates, enrollment projections, district philosophy, former statements of goals and objectives, and planning documents. Approximate time: two to three months.
- Staff (committee) summarizes and interprets the results of the preliminary activities. Approximate time: two months.
- Staff (committee) designs and distributes a major public opinion questionnaire. Approximate time: three to four months.
- Questionnaires are key punched and computer analyzed, and the results

"Once a board has set its goals, it must find ways to enable the schools to work toward their accomplishment." —School administrator, California

are organized and summarized into a final written report which is presented to the board. Approximate time: four to five months.

Total expected time: one to one and a-half years.

With the final report of the needs assessment in hand, and with goal recommendations from the administration, it's up to the board to establish or amend the formal and final goals and priorities for the district. It is not uncommon to have 30 or 40 goals evolve from the needs assessment, listed according to priority. Boards often require their administrative team to reduce the list to about 10 broad goals. This is in keeping with the advice of one school consultant who is fond of saying: "If the Lord could send down 10 commandments to ensure mankind would live life properly, then a school system ought to be able to operate on about the same number of goals."

"Leadership is important to the goal-setting process, but partnership is even more important. The board and the staff must work together to develop goals and design programs which will see that the goals are reached." —Board member, Virginia

Implementing. In many districts, once the board agrees on the goals and assigns a priority to each of them, the superintendent and staff are responsible for preparing a list of suggested activities for accomplishing each goal. Then, the administration submits this "action plan" to the board for approval.

Caution: It is important to establish specific but realistic target dates for the completion of goals and objectives. As one Florida board member explains: "Nothing destroys morale more quickly than overloading your administration and staff with tasks that defy completion within the time allowed. The practice leads to sloppy work. Worse, repeated failure to complete a highly publicized project on schedule will damage your credibility with the public."

Having the administration devise a plan for implementing goals is not the end of the board's goal-setting job. If goal setting is the penultimate test of a board's leadership abilities, getting results is the ultimate test. Essential to getting results is monitoring and evaluating the progress made toward reaching goals. Many boards require quarterly status reports from the administration.

One school superintendent explains his board's approach to monitoring implementation: "To keep track of progress, the administration submits a report each quarter—one page for each goal-related activity or project. (Plenty of extra copies are made available to the public.) Each goal is listed, its source is cited (Did it come from the needs assessment, the board, the teachers, or all three?), and progress is described in one or two short paragraphs."

With this kind of accountability system, the administration usually is on schedule or ahead of it. Board members are able to keep goals and priorities in focus. As one member said, "It helps avoid 'hip-shooting'—demanding that the administration solve some complex problem immediately."

As the board reviews and evaluates the progress toward its goals, it should also reevaluate the soundness of those goals. Many boards annually review their major and minor goals to revise and adjust them to the current situation.

"When our goals were finally adopted, many people in the community had a sense of satisfaction that they had had a say in what the schools were to accomplish. Enthusiasm for the schools ran high." —Board member, New Jersey

THOUGHT GOAL SETTING WAS A FAD!

Problems and pitfalls of goal setting

If goal setting is such a wonderful thing for a board to do, why don't more boards do it—or do it more often than they do?

Time is a major problem. Few boards find the time to address goals in their regular meetings. In order to set goals, board members often must schedule and attend special meetings or workshops.

Some boards lack the *skills* to set goals. Some have tried to set goals, only to end up frustrated because their goals are too vague, constrictive, irrelevant, or unrealistic. Other boards have had unrealistic expectations of what goals can do for them, and consequently abandon their goal-setting

"Goals can be realized when accountability for goals at the superintendent's level and for objectives at other levels are continuing expectations of the board." —Superintendent, Illinois

"Our fundamental job is to plan our programs around the needs of the community. We must weigh the alternatives (which may be competing), interpret community needs and values to the school staff, and make decisions on the basis of our best judgment." —Board member, Ohio

program when their goals aren't implemented, or when the goals they set do not completely anticipate the future or avoid crisis situations.

Some boards cannot reach a consensus on goals. If they try to force agreement on goals, intra-board conflict results. In such instances, the goal-setting process is often postponed or discarded.

Individual board member goals and "hidden agendas" are other deterrents to goal setting. Also, if the board and administration cannot agree on the process for goal setting, and who is to take responsibility for aspects of that process, that process usually doesn't get off the ground.

No panacea, but...

Setting goals does not mean things will always be pleasant, or that unpopular decisions will be avoided. It does not guarantee that there won't be any surprises. However, if unanticipated problems erupt, goals can provide direction for solving them. Goals provide the framework on which to build, but they also provide a useful fall-back position when the heat is turned up. If the goal setting has been done correctly and has involved thoughtful discussion between the board, staff, and community, then the process should later provide a vehicle by which the board and administration can gain acceptance of tough decisions they are forced to make.

"I wish we set goals more often because, when we don't, we are prone to lose sight of things or end up doing band-aid things instead." —Board member, Nevada

TIPS ON WORDING GOALS

How your board states its goals is almost as important as stating them. For best results, begin board goals with action verbs that describe the single key result intended by that goal. *Examples: complete, submit, issue, verify, increase,* and *reduce.*

Avoid verbs that describe a process, rather than a result. *Examples: study, evaluate,* and *focus*. These words indicate broad activities with obscure beginnings and foggy endings.

LOOKING AT YOUR COMMUNITY: A CHECKLIST OF THINGS TO KNOW

When setting goals, adopting policies, or making other decisions, some board members make the mistake of assuming they know their community. As one Florida member put it, "We say we know our community; it's a matter of pride."

For the most part, board members, especially new board members, know only a segment of the community—what it's like, and what it expects of its schools.

Communities constantly change. Businesses come and go, populations shift, neighborhoods can become unrecognizable. All of these changes affect school goals and policies.

Following are some questions that, if you answer them, should put you in better touch with the entire school community.

○ How fast is your community changing? How is it changing?
○ Is the community's tax base changing? If so, how?
○ Is the population increasing, decreasing, or stable?
○ Are large industries moving in or out? Expanding? Shutting down?
○ Is the median age of your community population getting older?
○ Will there be fewer or more children in the schools? Which schools?
○ Are the people in your community improving their socio-economic status? Or, is this status declining?
○ Are certain neighborhoods or schools dominated by different racial groups? Is the racial make-up of your schools changing? Slowly? Rapidly?
○ What languages are spoken in your community?
○ What religions are practiced in your district?
○ What is the percentage of single-parent households?
○ How many students have both parents working away from the home?
○ Who are the business, social, religious, civic, and school leaders in your community? How do they lead?
○ Which educators in your district have the respect of most citizens?
○ What percentage of the community's children attend private schools?
○ What is the education level of most adults in the community?
○ What expectations do community employers have of high school graduates?
○ Where do your graduates go? College? Work? Armed forces?

Policy making

> ***"Make no mistake about it: Policy making is tough, hard work. It requires careful study, deep thought, penetration of the unknown future, intense desire for improvement, and courage to point the way."***
> ***—Board member, New Jersey***

If there were a physician who specialized in school board service, he would surely prescribe policy making as the penicillin to cure most ills that afflict a board and its administration.

If a board spends most of its time debating such things as how the roof of the high school will be repaired, or whether to spend $35 to send a teacher to a workshop, it is plagued with the illness of "administrative trivia." These routine decisions could be handled by the superintendent and his staff if the board had adopted policies on "School Maintenance" and "Workshops and Conferences for Staff" to provide the foundation for administrative action.

When a board and its chief administrator are confused about roles and authority, or are plagued with misunderstandings, board policy is a likely remedy. It serves to clarify board and superintendent functions.

Ambiguity, confusion, and trouble are avoided when policies are adopted and published. Clearly written policies that reflect thorough research, sound judgment, and careful planning stave off the maiming accusations of uninformed critics.

Written policies can:

○ Show that the board is running a business-like operation.

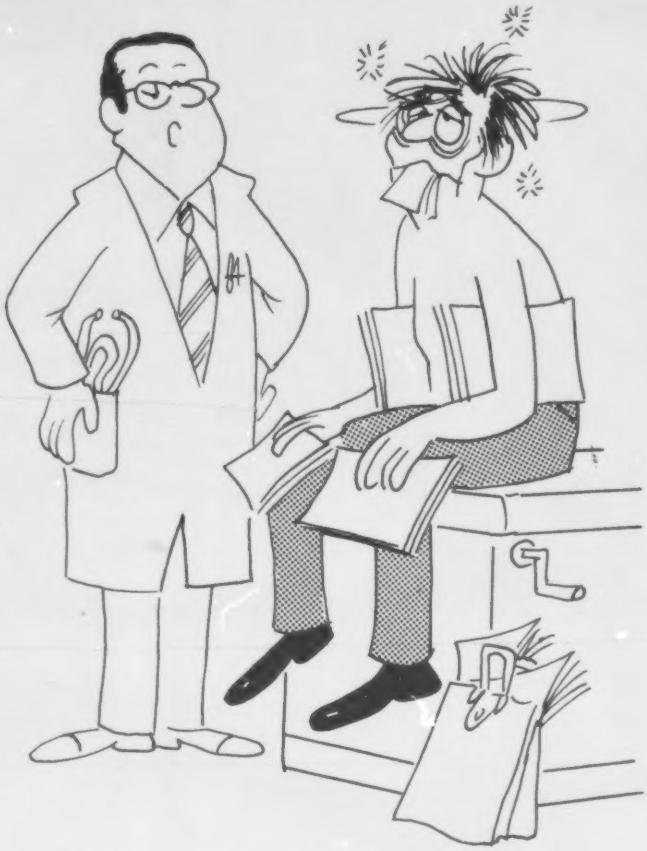
○ Give credence to board actions. People tend to *respect* what's in writing, even though they may not agree with everything that is in the policy manual.

○ Establish a legal record, as well as a legal basis for many actions.

○ Foster stability and continuity. Board and staff members may come and go, but the policy manual endures and helps assure smooth transitions when organizational or staff changes occur.

○ Give the public a means to evaluate board performance.

○ Improve staff morale by facilitating fair and uniform treatment.



"It's a common ailment among school board members. You've got the administrative trivia bug."

○ Aid in orienting new board members and staff members.

○ Provide a sound basis for appraisal and accountability, and facilitate the process of evaluating board and administrative practices.

Also, when the board is armed with a set of well-defined policies, the following types of "board malpractice" are less likely to occur.

Instant policy making... when the school board makes a decision too hastily; without benefit of research, study, cool deliberation, due notice, or sufficient input.

Dictatorial policy making... when the school board makes policy unilaterally, without seeking the advice of those who will be affected—students, teachers and other staff, parents, and other community members.

Illegal policy making... when the board makes policy decisions which conflict with state law, federal regulations, or the prevailing court opinions on school law issues.

Sloppy policy making... when the board fails to assign the drafting of policy statements to a competent writer. Trying to devise language to meet a board policy objective during a board meeting usually results in wordy, vague, or confusing policy statements.

Contradictory policy making... when the board has no mechanism (such as a policy classification system) for the immediate retrieval of prior policy decisions (which otherwise exist only as historical items buried in the minutes).

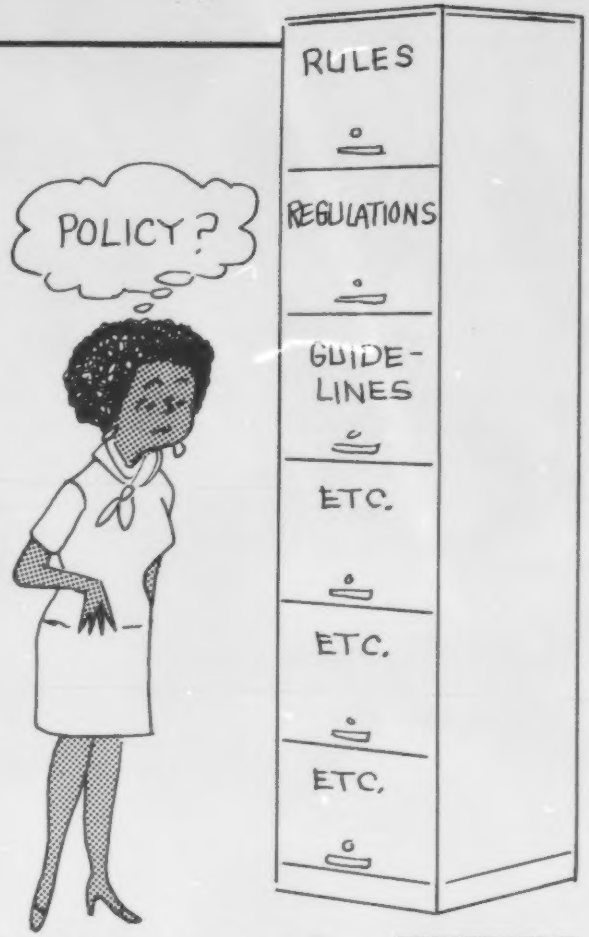
"Written and organized policies liberate the board from the shackles of disorderly procedure, and enable the board to exercise more control, not less." —Board member, Connecticut

If you are like many of your board counterparts, you hold written policies in high regard, but you might be confused about exactly what policy is, and what your role is in making policy. You also might be deterred by these two prevalent myths: the idea that policy making is too difficult and the belief that it is impossibly time consuming.

Don't underestimate yourself! As one policy consultant advised: "It's nonsense to think that you have to be a combination of a corporation lawyer, a visionary, and a Thomas Jefferson before you can venture to write policy. If the board knows what it wants, and can communicate those wants in clear, concise English, it can write policy. And, you're wrong if you think that policy making is so time consuming that ordinary mortals, already plagued by five-hour board meetings, cannot be expected to take on this task. It's surprising how much thoughtful policy work gets done if the board will routinely set aside part of every meeting to discuss policy issues rather than immediate needs."

Just what is policy?

Don't be too tough on yourself if you are a little fuzzy about the definition of policy. Sure, you are generally familiar with this term: Our Constitution is riddled with policy such as, "No person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law," and, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." Almost daily we make personal decisions which, in effect, are policy decisions. For example, you and your spouse may decide that when your daughter goes out on a date, curfew time will be 10:30 on weekdays and midnight on weekends. Or, you may decide that you will take your vacations during the winter instead of the summer. In this way, you have determined the pattern of your work and recreation.



The difficulty in defining school board policy comes when you try to go beyond a general definition and become very specific about what policy is and is not—something each board and administration must do.

A widely used general definition of policy was developed jointly in 1955 by the National School Boards Association and the American Association of School Administrators:

"School board policies are statements which set forth the purposes and prescribe in general terms the organization and program of a school system. They create a framework within which the superintendent and his staff can discharge their assigned duties with positive direction. They tell what is wanted. They may also indicate why and how much."

Part of the confusion which arises whenever a comprehensive definition of policy is attempted can be attributed to the varying use of key words, such as "rule," "regulation," "guideline," "procedure," and "directive." Since most of these terms are used to try to explain what policy is or is not, how each word is understood by *your* board is vital to a clear understanding of policy making.

While the word "policy" is universally accepted as a proper term to describe formal, written board statements; some boards also call their policy statements "rules" or even "regulations." There are boards which adopt "general" policies (sometimes called "guidelines") and "specific" policies (occasionally labeled "rules"). When some boards adopt a formal structure for taking specific actions (such as closing schools or selecting a superintendent), the process may be called a "procedure."

Further "word pollution" affecting the policy-making environment is generated by the use of different terms to describe the written actions taken by the administration to *implement* board policy in the course of daily operations. Some superintendents issue "administrative regulations." Others implement board policy through "guidelines," "procedures," "rules," or "directives." No wonder confusion reigns supreme!

Some boards try to simplify things by deciding that *anything* written which is adopted by the board (other than "yes or no" decisions on specific issues which are recorded in the board minutes) is policy. Other boards limit policy making to general statements of future goals, expectations, or prohibitions.

So much has been made of these semantic differences, that the basic function of a board's definition of policy making is often overlooked. When a board declares what policy is and is not, it is drawing the line between the role of the board and the role of the administration. If the definition of policy is fuzzy, that dividing line will be obscured. If a board's understanding of its policy-making function is vague or constantly changing, the inevitable result is board-administration conflict.

The specific labels placed on board action and administrative action are not that important. It is vital that the functions and authorities which give real meaning to the terms you choose are well-defined and understood.

Whichever labels you use or choose, giving real substance to those words is an ongoing struggle which each board must face. Sometimes it is easier to define what policy is by examining what it is not.

Policy is not detailed directions for operating a school system or running a particular program. *How* board policy is to be implemented—by whom, with what, when, and where—is the essence of administrative management. Thus, a board makes policy when it requires that "Each student shall receive a quarterly graded report of academic progress in each subject area." The administration gives directions on implementing this policy when it indicates that "Each teacher will fill out a two-part report card in ink for each student in his classes; give Part 1 to the student at the end of the class period on the last day of the reporting period. Part 2 of the report card shall be submitted to the principal at least two days before the end of the reporting period and kept on permanent file. Grades of A (excellent), B (very good), C (average), D (below average), F (unsatisfactory), and I (incomplete) shall be used to indicate the level of progress of each student. Report cards will also indicate attendance in class and provide space for teacher comments."

HOW ONE BOARD CUT SEMANTIC CONFUSION

Sometimes the best way to approach a "choice of words" is a process of elimination. One urban school board decided to avoid words that were too imprecise or too widely used to define official actions *other than* board policy or administrative action. The term "regulations" (the term most often used by federal and state agencies to describe their pronouncements) was rejected. "Procedures" was omitted, since it could be used to describe both board and administrative actions. "Guidelines" hit the cutting room floor because it was both vague and too easily confused with "goals" and "objectives," which are just a part of policy making.

Finally, the board decided that it would define board policy as the written "rules" under which the school district would operate, and that it would label the administration's written statements on how the rules would be implemented "superintendent's directives." Having dispensed with semantics, the board could then get down to the nitty-gritty of determining what decisions were "rules" to be adopted as board policy, and which decisions were properly within the scope of administrative "directives" that required no board action.

Policy is not a codification of practices. Just because the board has handled certain matters the same way each time they arise, or has dealt with some issues in a "traditional" manner, doesn't mean that the board has adopted these practices as policy. If the board develops a pattern of action, it might be tempted to assume that this "implied" policy will be followed by the administration or future board members. This type of "word of mouth" accumulation of unwritten policy (or, more properly, "non-policy") is a frequent source of confusion, misinterpretation, contradiction, legal complications, board-superintendent hassles, and poor public relations.

Policies are not restatements or paraphrases of state law or regulations and guidelines issued by federal or state governments. While it is often necessary for a board to adopt policy in order to implement or comply with state or federal statutes and regulations, merely repeating or rewriting state or federal law is not policy making. For example, if a statute provides, "The board shall observe a fiscal year that begins on the first day of July and ends on the thirtieth day of the following June," the board is pre-empted from adopting this as policy.

Policies are not the same as board decisions. In an interview for this book, one board member said: "A board's decisions become its policies." This really depends on what kind of decisions they are. A board "decides" to adopt a budget, hire a school principal, or allow a religious group to use the school auditorium. These decisions are simply a board's actions in carrying out its responsibilities as mandated by state law. If the board, however, "decides" to establish new criteria for the hiring of school principals or for the use of school facilities, it is making policies that will affect future decisions.

Policies are not board bylaws. A board must have in writing the basic procedures by which it will conduct its business. Some of these ground rules or bylaws are usually mandated by state law. Bylaws should be included for convenience in the board's policy manual, but they are not board policy. Board bylaws address board meeting procedures, board organization, board elections, board member resignation, the use of consultants and advisory committees, voting methods, and more.

A policy is not a job description. Although job descriptions are important tools for the management of the schools, especially the superintendent's job description, they are not board policy. The superintendent's job description is directly affected by policy, especially those board policies which delegate authority (when permitted by state law) or require the superintendent to take implementing action.

Other considerations

The type of policies your board puts into its policy manual will depend, to a great degree, not on any standard definition (since there is no "standard" definition), but on your policy needs.

If your board has a strong superintendent who understands how the board thinks and makes good decisions, your policies can be very broad in scope to give the superintendent lots of room in which to make those decisions. On the other hand, if the board has an untested or shaky relationship with the superintendent, it might need policies which provide a more specific framework for administrative action.

The inclusion of statements of state law or regulations in the board's policy manual is a tricky issue. Some school lawyers believe that since state law is not policy (the board has no power to adopt or amend law which has already been enacted by the state legislature), it should not be included in the policy manual. "Trying to restate or paraphrase the law can get you in trouble," they say. "Keep a state education law book and an attorney on hand," they advise. Other attorneys who know that, in practice, some school boards do neither, believe that copies of certain laws—like those regarding school district and board legal status, executive sessions, open meeting laws, and budget proceedings—should be included in an appendix or special section of the board's policy book. "If it's not in the policy book," they say, "the board and administration might not be aware of it, and consequently might act illegally."

"Policy is defined in so many ways, it has almost become a 'non-word.' Often, a board's first policy decision must be 'what is policy?' The answer affects every board decision and administrative action." —School attorney Virginia

The basic decision

Although some of the suggestions and descriptions discussed in this section may assist you in reaching an answer to the question "what is policy?" no single definition is applicable to every school board. Education statutes and regulations are different in each state, and large districts have different policy requirements from smaller districts.

The boundaries of policy making are shaped by many factors. Responses to the following questions will directly affect *how much* policy your board must adopt, as well as how general or specific that policy must be:

○ How much "policy" is made at the state level? How detailed are state statutes and regulations?

"Mr. Lopez thought he had a clear definition of school board policy, but it turned out to be an ulcer."

- ○ Are there state laws or regulations that require your board to take some actions in certain ways, such as school closings or bond issues?
- ○ How much authority does the board have to delegate final decisions to the superintendent? For example, can your board adopt a policy which allows the superintendent to hire staff in accordance with board policy, or must the board act on all employment matters?
- ○ Do state or federal laws and regulations require the board to adopt policies in certain areas (such as community use of school buildings or treatment of handicapped students)?

The types of policy decisions a board must make are directly influenced by the types of operating decisions it makes. For example, a board which votes on employment of new teachers, promotions, and adverse actions should have a policy which covers the board's process (or procedure) for reviewing the superintendent's recommendations and making decisions. On the other hand, in a school district where the superintendent makes some (or all) final decisions on staff employment, the board policy should establish clear criteria, rules, and minimum procedural requirements—leaving the details of process and procedure to the administration.

Regardless of the variations in law, state regulations, local political considerations, district size, and board-superintendent relationships, the last word on the definition of policy in your district must be written by your board. All boards make policy—one way or another. If your district is running smoothly, with little board-superintendent friction, a minimum of legal problems, and few long board meetings spent wrangling over operational decisions, you probably already have a good handle on policy making. If not, study this section again, then read on!

Developing board policy

Ultimately, of course, the board is responsible for developing policy. You or any other member of your board may identify a need for policy and initiate action for policy development, but unless you serve in a very small district, you probably will not spend much time actually writing policy. As one Illinois school business manager put it, "A

"HI!! Have you given any serious thought to school board policy while on vacation? If so, GOOD!! Have a nice day!"

board member is not a desirable policy writer. Board members have more important things to do."

There are a number of candidates for the difficult job of drafting policy statements. In small districts, the superintendent often assumes the major responsibility for actually writing and organizing policies, as well as developing administrative directives to implement them. In other districts, an assistant superintendent (or some other central office administrator or full-time staff member who can double as a policy writer) will take on this task.

Another way to get policies written and organized is to hire a consultant to do it. The National School Boards Association has been in the policy consulting business for over 10 years. NSBA's Educational Policies Service (EPS) offers varying levels of assistance with policy development and policy manual compilation. Your state school boards association may have a comparable service, and there are numerous local consulting firms and individuals which will work with your board to develop a policy manual. The fees for such services range from $3,000 to over $20,000.

Some districts retain a former board member or a retired administrator to help maintain their policy manual. This approach can be successful, if the appointee is knowledgeable of existing board policies and procedures, and understands the difference between board policy-making authority as well as administrative responsibilities in your district.

"A board's efficiency increases with each new policy it develops." —Board member, Pennsylvania

The policy process

The late William E. Dickinson, who founded NSBA's Educational Policies Service, described policy development as "a process during which a school board brings forth its own ideas (or receives the ideas of its professional staff); then checks them, weighs them, ponders them, gets agreement on them, and finally puts them into writing for all the community to see and know."

In theory, this is fine. The truth is that many school board members get migraine headaches trying to pursue formal policy making. In order to develop an organized manual and keep it up-to-date, your board needs an orderly process for policy making.

Recognize the need for policy. The process of policy development begins with a recognition of the need for written policy. Often, a board or superintendent faces a decision which would be easier to make if a policy existed, such as:

- The board president's second cousin is the low bidder for the school maintenance contract. A policy defining conflict of interest would eliminate many of the questions about the propriety of such an arrangement.
- Students have been distributing an underground newspaper at the high school. Policies on students' rights and responsibilities could help the administration avoid a sticky legal problem.
- A citizen group wants to name a new elementary school after Ronald Reagan. The board should have a policy on the naming and renaming of facilities.

The board is not alone in identifying policy needs. Parents, students, teachers, the local taxpayers' association, the superintendent, the state or federal government, and pressure groups are all sources of policy issues and problems.

"Too often, the need for a new or revised policy is sighted through the flares of a crisis. It's important to identify policy needs before trouble strikes." —Board member, Oklahoma

Assemble facts. Once the need for policy is recognized, the board must learn all it can about the issue at hand. If the matter is simple and uncomplicated, such as authorizing a petty cash account for building principals, a resolution of the issue may involve little more than the superintendent and the board. However, if the matter is complicated or sensitive, the study may take weeks, months, or even a year or two. It may also involve many others in the collection of facts and information, including advisory committees, the state school boards association, state education officials, universities, sample policies and information from NSBA's EPS Information Clearinghouse, legal counsel, private industry, neighborhood teams, consultants, action groups, and other logical sources of information.

Get recommendations. Once facts are available, the board listens to recommendations for handling the policy issue. The superintendent is often charged with recommending policy action, since he is the one responsible for carrying out the policy. (By law, in some states, the board cannot legally adopt a policy without having a recommendation from the superintendent.) Recommendations also may come from other staff, a policy study committee, or concerned citizens.

Discuss, debate, and decide on substance. After becoming informed and hearing all recommendations, the board discusses, debates, and finally decides what the substance of the policy will be.

When reviewing the contents of any policy, your board should ask the following questions:

○ Is the content within the scope of the board's authority?

○ Is it consistent with local, state, and federal law? The U.S. Constitution?

○ Does it support the school district's goals or objectives?

○ Is it good educational (personnel, business) practice?

○ Is it reasonable? (Are any requirements or prohibitions arbitrary, discriminatory, or capricious?)

○ Does it adequately cover the subject?

○ Is it limited to *one* policy topic?

○ Is it consistent with the board's existing policies?

○ Can it be administered? Is is practical? How much will it cost?

Draft the policy. After the board has reached concensus on policy content, the board's policy writer goes to work. This person must be able to write clearly, directly, and succinctly. Pomposity, verbosity, educational jargon, and "legalese" should be avoided.

Hold a first reading, give notice. Once in writing, the policy draft is placed on the board's agenda for a first reading, giving everyone interested in it an opportunity to express their views. Most boards do not take their final action on a policy at this stage. They do decide whether the policy reflects their thinking on the substance of the issue, whether there is a need for minor editorial changes, or whether a "second draft" will be required.

"A board should decide on a policy on the basis of what is right and proper for the cause of education, not on the basis of what's popular or expedient."
—Board member, Vermont

"Policy writing is a one-man task. Boards and committees can determine positions, make decisions, evaluate, and approve or disapprove policy drafts; but they waste enormous amounts of time stewing and fussing when they try to write sentences and cope with syntax."
—Board member, Maine

"About the format to our policy on discipline...."

***"If the staff doesn't want a policy, you will need to watch its implementation very carefully."* —Board member, Maine**

If there are serious objections to the policy proposal and the board decides to have the policy redrafted, a second "first" reading may be necessary. If the draft is acceptable, all that is needed is the scheduling of a second reading and adoption.

Hold second reading, adopt. The period between the first and second readings allows time for all concerned persons to ask questions, make comments, and offer suggestions for changes and improvements. The first draft of the policy may have been rewritten to reflect the board's concerns or comments received after the first reading. Now it's time to vote. If rejected, the proposal goes back to the drawing board with instructions for changes, and the policy draftsman prepares a new draft which more accurately reflects the board's desires. If the policy is adopted, with or without modifications, it becomes official.

***"If we publicize our policies in the community, and those policies aren't being implemented, the parents will tell us."* —Board member, Kentucky**

Decide whether to review. At this point, the board may or may not express a desire to review the written directives and procedures that the administration prepares to implement the policy. The board has this prerogative. Some school board leaders say that if a board has confidence in its superintendent, it will not normally engage in detailed oversight of routine policy execution. Others recommend that a board should evaluate and discuss administrative implementation materials (with the superintendent) for three reasons:

○ To determine whether the superintendent understands the intent of the policy.

○ To help catch any problems with the procedures that are developed.

○ To learn from the administration if certain aspects of the policy are going to be more difficult or expensive to implement than the board anticipated. Policies that cannot be implemented are the cause of misunderstanding, legal problems, and strained board-superintendent relationships. They also harm the board's credibility, waste time and money, and produce a negative public relations climate.

***"We had a poorly worded policy that implied that grades could be revoked if the student was a discipline problem. The administration interpreted it that way and suddenly we had 50 angry parents storming the board room because their kids' grades had been reduced."* —Board member, Montana**

Disseminate. The adoption of a policy is not the last step in policy development. A policy that is buried in the board's minutes or in a file somewhere isn't worth the paper on which it's written. The board must see that the policy is properly coded and included in all copies of the board's policy manual. In addition, some boards publicize their policies in the local newspaper and in school newsletters, and distribute them to the leaders of school and community organizations. Seeing that your policies are distributed as widely as possible is one way to ensure implementation.

Enforce, evaluate, revise. A board usually relies on the administration for the enforcement and periodic evaluation of board policies. It may require (usually in a policy) that the superintendent call attention to policies that are out-of-date or in need of revision. The policy writing and revision process is essentially the same for amending existing rules to meet changing needs, to clarify vague or misinterpreted policies, or to comply with new laws or court decisions.

***"If the administration is having trouble implementing a policy, it often brings the policy before the board for review and revision. Also, grievances are often clues to poor—or poorly interpreted—policies."* —Board member, New York**

SUGGESTION

When you hear that something is amiss in the schools, it's a good idea to maintain an attitude of "innocent until proven guilty." Your board policies, not the administration's handling of them, may be the problem. Be sure to get a full report from the superintendent before you react (or overreact).

Developing a policy manual

Does your board have its policies compiled and codified in an up-to-date policy manual? If not, it's very possible that a number of board members, administrators, teachers, students, and others don't know what the district's policies are. In the absence of an official, up-to-date policy manual, policies are hidden in the minutes, dispersed in different forms in various staff and student handbooks, isolated in master contracts with employees, lost in the obsolete policy manual that no one uses anymore, or mixed up in sundry administrative memoranda.

A project to codify and update board policies into a manual is very much like cleaning the attic. It involves a lot of sorting, searching, and re-arranging. If done well, such a project entails tasks such as these:

○ Searching all important school district documents for information relative to policy.

○ Identifying both explicit and implied policies, and analyzing all statements of "implied" policy as to their appropriateness for adoption and inclusion in the new manual.

***"Once you make policy, stick to it. If you can't stick to it, discuss it, and change it."* —Board member, Montana**

"Before you jump up and start revising your policy manual, understand that reviewing it takes a lot of time and work."
—Board member, Nebraska

- ○ Providing technical editing of all policy statements in order to meet the requirements of acceptable English usage, eliminate redundancies, resolve contradictions, and eliminate extraneous matter.
- ○ Checking all statements for consistency with state law, state education department regulations, federal guidelines, and court rulings.
- ○ Identifying vital areas which are not covered by existing written policy.
- ○ Recommending board action to adopt needed new policies or revise existing policy.
- ○ Typing, proofreading, duplicating, acquiring and imprinting binders; and, in general, producing a major new reference book—the policy manual.

Once the attic is cleaned, the board, administration, and everyone else can see what is there. They now have a "corporate memory" of past decisions that relate to the governance and management of the schools.

The project of developing a board policy manual is a service that should be performed *for* the board, not *by* the board or a board committee. As one school board leader explains it: "The board operates at the decision-making level, not at the service level of manual preparation. This is why board members should not be engaged in project activities. The eager 'volunteer' board member who wants to dig in and perform the function of project director or project assistant might be thanked for his interest, but gently dissuaded from taking on the job.

"For one thing, volunteers cannot be held accountable for their work. In addition, it is difficult for a board member to identify policies 'as they are' and resist the temptation to try to create on-the-spot new policies 'as they should be.' Also, it is extremely difficult for other board members to criticize or evaluate administrative work done by a fellow board member. It is more important for board members to use their time and energies in looking ahead, planning ahead, and dealing constructively with current policy issues than in dealing with policy materials created a year or more in the past. The actual work of the policy manual project should be done by in-house staff or by a consultant working under the direction of the superintendent."

If your board opts for a policy manual project, its primary responsibility will be to make major decisions and to give final approval. For example:

- ○ The board will probably decide, on the superintendent's recommendation, whether the project will be done by the district staff or by an outside consultant.
- ○ The board should examine the proposed organization of the new manual to ensure that a good policy codification system is planned.

The board will need to approve the new manual (including formal adoption of proposed changes to existing policy, if any), authorize its distribution, and ensure that plans are made to maintain it.

If, during the project, gaps in policy are identified, the board will want to examine those issues, establish priorities, and develop new policies to fill the gaps.

"It took us two years to complete our manual, so we take care to constantly revise and update it so that we never will have to do such an immense job again."
—Board member, Delaware

"Many boards let their manuals sit on a shelf and gather dust. The effect is a system that does not do what it was intended to do. It does not protect the board from legal risk and does not contribute to the orderly management of the district."
—State association executive, South Carolina

"The ultimate evaluation of a policy manual is its usefulness. This depends on the willingness of the affected people to learn about the manual and to accept it as a part of the school system."
—Board member, Virginia

TEST YOUR MANUAL

How good (or bad) is your policy manual? If someone mentions your board's policy manual, do you or your colleagues give any of these responses?

- ○ What policy manual?
- ○ I never voted for it.
- ○ We're not bound by it.
- ○ Finding anything in it is too difficult.
- ○ It's too vague and poorly written to be of much use.

WHY BOARDS *DON'T* MAKE POLICY

Written policies are the means by which school districts operate most efficiently. Why then do so many school boards neglect this important duty? The National School Boards Association discovered the following reasons in a nationwide survey:

- ○ Lack of time or staff.
- ○ Lack of administrative leadership.
- ○ Negative board attitudes about written policy.
- ○ Lack of policy-making "know-how."
- ○ Frequent turnover of board members and superintendents.
- ○ The high cost of consulting assistance.
- ○ Lack of available resource information.

THE POLICIES A BOARD NEEDS ON POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

A board needs to develop policies and procedures (or bylaws) on every aspect of board operations. There is no exception when it comes to policy development and implementation. Board policy should contain the following provisions governing its policy-making process:

- A general statement on the board's authority and responsibility to establish policy.
- Formal recognition of the system the board will follow in coding and filing its policies.
- A delegation of responsibility for drafting policies and for maintaining the board's policy manual.
- A specific procedure for identifying policy issues, for planning and researching policy proposals before board action, and for involving appropriate staff and community members in the preparation of proposals.
- A clear statement of the procedure by which policies are actually adopted by the board.
- Provisions for the ongoing review and evaluation of policies and, specifically, for updating the board's policy manual at least once a year.
- An oversight or review process by which the board will be kept informed about the methods and procedures the administration devises to implement policies.

KEY POLICY AREAS

Major policy categories and topics that most boards include in their policy manuals are:

Powers and duties

Board legal status, board member ethics, organizational meetings, board-superintendent relationship, advisory committees, meeting procedures, and board policy development.

Educational philosophy and commitment

Community, staff, and student involvement in decision making; educational goals for the district; and nondiscrimination.

School personnel

Recruiting, hiring, and firing; equal employment opportunity; pay schedules and benefits; time schedules; staff ethics; health and safety; personnel records; staff complaints and grievances; reduction-in-force; professional staff assignments and transfers; part-time help; development opportunities; and evaluation of staff.

Fiscal management

Budget planning and adoption, deposit of funds, check writing and signing, inventories, audits, purchasing, expense requirements, and disposal of school property.

School facilities

Facilities planning, bond campaigns, site acquisition, construction contracts, bids and awards, naming of new facilities, dedication of new facilities, temporary facilities, and renovation or retirement of facilities.

Support services

School safety, emergency plans, buildings and grounds security, access to buildings, vandalism, the use of school-owned materials, student transportation by bus and private vehicles, school bus safety, food services, free and reduced-price lunches, insurance management, and data management.

Instruction

Instructional goals and priorities, academic freedom, school calendar, organization of instruction, curriculum development, basic instruction program, programs for handicapped students, co-curricular and extracurricular programs, student fund-raising activities, student activities fund management, standardized testing and use of results, adult education programs, class size, instructional materials, textbook selection and adoption, library materials selection and adoption, teacher aides, field trips and excursions, grading systems, final exams, student and parent conferences, promotion and retention of students, graduation requirements, teaching about controversial issues, and controversial speakers.

Students

Equal educational opportunity; entrance age; school admissions of resident and non-resident students; assignment of students to schools; student absences and excuses; student rights and responsibilities; student conduct; student dress code; student publications; smoking, drinking, and drug abuse; dangerous weapons in the schools; pregnant and married students; interrogations and searches; student complaints and grievances; corporal punishment; student detention, probation, suspension, and expulsion; student insurance program; physical examinations and immunizations; emergency medical treatment; child abuse reporting; student fees, fines and charges; and student records.

Community relations

The public's right to know, news media relations, community use of school facilities, public solicitations and advertising in the schools, visitors to the schools, handling of public complaints, relations with parent organizations, and relations with other local government authorities.

Education agency relations

Relations with other schools and school districts, shared services, student teaching and internships, and relations with educational accreditation agencies.

Board self-evaluation

"Good practice starts at the top. You start with the board and the board starts with self-evaluation." —Board member, South Carolina

"Good board evaluation practice means that you look at what board members do and not what they are." —Board member, Minnesota

How well are you and your board doing as school leaders?

Many boards attempt to answer this question by assessing public opinion. If there are few complaints from members of the community and staff, they believe they are doing all right.

It's common to hear a board member say, "I get evaluated at the polls." Some appointed board members view reappointment as an affirmation that they are doing a good job.

The public can provide informal evaluation of a board, but it cannot provide the kind of evaluation a board *really* needs. It is a rare community member who understands the roles and responsibilities of a board and measures a board's performance in light of them. Instead, as one board member explained: "The public evaluates the local board of education when it reads a magazine article that says, 'Johnny Can't Read.' Success at the polls is a political event, and does not always reflect a given board member's professional growth and performance. The best people to do a constructive evaluation of the board are the board members themselves and the people they work with—the central office staff."

The right kind of evaluation

As with many aspects of school board service, there is no one "right" method of board self-evaluation. How a board views its role will affect the way that board evaluates itself. For example, if a board assumes its primary role to be the approval of bills and the development of a budget, then only a simple evaluation is needed. On the other end of the spectrum, if a board sees its role as inextricably tied to the success and failure of all school district programs; if it views itself as the district navigator, charting both the purpose and direction of the district; then there is need for a much more extensive evaluation. Somewhere in between these two extremes lies a self-evaluation technique that is right for your board.

"But Wilkins, this is heaven! You don't have to worry about school board self-evaluation!"

Ingredients of effective evaluations

Although there is no one form of evaluation that will work for all boards, there are some standards school board veterans see as essential evaluation elements and outcomes, such as:

An evaluation should be constructive. It should be a tool that is both positive and helpful, assessing both the strengths and weaknesses of a board. It should provide a systematic process by which the members of a board can improve their performance.

Board members should develop the standards against which they will evaluate themselves. They should be involved in developing the standards that measure their relationship with the superintendent; how well they conduct board meetings; and how effectively they plan, make decisions, and set policy. Evaluation at the end of the year should be based on what the board planned to do at the beginning of the year.

Evaluation should be based on goals the board sets for itself, not on goals it sets for the entire school system. When developing an evaluation instrument, the board should recognize the difference between board goals and district goals.

The evaluation process should include board establishment of objectives and strategies for improving board performance. Some boards include in their evaluation instruments a place where evaluators can write in suggestions for improvement. These suggestions are used to set objectives and priorities.

"In most communities, the public is really of little help in evaluating the board of education because the public doesn't know what the board does." —Board member, Arkansas

"Self-evaluation is introspective. It requires, by its very title, that the evaluation be done not by outside individuals or consultants, but rather by the board members themselves—those involved in, and responsible for, the success or failure of the board."
—Board member, New Jersey

The board should not limit itself to those items that appear on the evaluation form. Although an evaluation form will help start board discussion, informal comments also have value.

Formal evaluation should occur at least once a year and at a scheduled time and place. Many boards hold annual evaluations with a mid-year review. Once a final report is written, the evaluation process is recycled with the re-establishment of board goals for improvement and accomplishment.

A composite picture of board strengths and weaknesses is best. Each board member should complete an evaluation form independently. Then the board as a whole should meet to compare and discuss results.

The board should be evaluated as a whole, not as individuals. Although some self-evaluation instruments allow for an individual assessment of a board member's strengths and weaknesses, these self-assessments usually are not shared with other members of the board. Evaluations which avoid personal criticism are generally more productive, since they focus on board *action* rather than on personalities.

The board should have an orientation and in-service program for its members. Self-evaluation should not occur until all members of the board understand what is expected of them. Thus, when new members come aboard, they should be introduced to the evaluative criteria and goals the board has set for itself. In addition, the board as a whole might need to undergo training in areas in which it functions poorly. For example, if board members want to improve their policy-making abilities or their relationship with the superintendent, they might hire a consultant to help them do this.

"An important part of the evaluation process is getting to know one another better as people, and coming to share an understanding of an educational philosophy."
—Board member, Tennessee

Methods of evaluation

One form of informal board evaluation is to assess comments and criticisms from constituents. "How vocal is the community?" "What do community members and school employees say about the schools?" "What are their concerns about the management of the schools?" The answers to such questions can provide a backdrop for a critical look at the board's functioning.

Another informal means of evaluation is to examine the minutes of board meetings to see how much attention the board devotes to that which it deems most important. Although such an assessment might form the sole basis of self-evaluation, it is best to include it as part of the total process.

Most popular among the various self-evaluation techniques is the questionnaire. This self-analysis instrument can make evaluation more manageable by listing the criteria against which the board will appraise its own performance.

Questionnaires can be lengthy and all-inclusive, categorizing evaluative questions or statements under broad headings such as board operations, instructional program, relationship with the superintendent, fiscal management, facilities management, non-instructional services, personnel, and school-community relations. Other questionnaires can be designed to measure board effectiveness in just one area, such as board meeting procedures.

In addition, a questionnaire can be designed to measure both board "process" and board "product." *Process* evaluation deals with how the board operates. *Product* evaluation deals with the results a board obtains as an outgrowth of setting goals.

"When we think back to our successes, make group assessments, and think about what we want to happen in the future, we become more united in our goals and philosophies."
—Board member, North Carolina

There are many sample questionnaires available which your board might wish to adopt in their entirety. Most boards extract various elements from several instruments to construct one that best suits their needs.

An example of a "process" evaluation instrument is one developed jointly by the National School Boards Association and the American Association of School Administrators.

Another instrument that evaluates the process or operational performance of the board was developed by David B. Martin of the Ohio School Boards Association, entitled, "To See Ourselves As Others See Us." This instrument covers such areas as board meetings, relationship with administrators, board-community relations, and personal qualities of board members. It asks whether the board always, sometimes, or never does such things as:

- Receives agenda and background materials well in advance of meeting.
- Does not present new issues of a complex nature for immediate action.
- Ensures that a good public participation policy is in effect.
- Evaluates the performance of the superintendent on a regular basis.
- Works and plans with the adminis-

tration in a spirit of mutual trust.

- Actively seeks input from the community in establishing goals and objectives.

An instrument entitled "Self Analysis," developed by Albert E. Holliday (editor and publisher of the *Journal of Educational Communications*), covers the areas of orientation, operational method, meetings of the board, school-community relations, planning, and continued development of board members. Among other things, it asks if the board:

- Conducts an orientation program for new board members to acquaint them with their duties and responsibilities and with board policies and operating procedures.
- Operates according to written policies.
- Seeks the superintendent's recommendation on policy matters.
- Schedules board meetings at times and locations convenient to board members, the staff, and community residents.

Because of the nature of "product" evaluation instruments, each district will need to develop its own, based on the specific goals it wants to achieve.

"We start our evaluation with a standard form, but then we sit down and discuss each item. This honest and frank discussion is something I look forward to each year."
—Board member, Maryland

"We asked patrons, parents, administrators, and the news media to respond to our board effectiveness survey. The result gave us a good idea of how the people who work closely with us view our effectiveness."
—Board member, Arizona

The keys to success

The critical factor in board self-evaluation is not the instrument or process a board uses, but the need to identify the specific criteria that spell success for a board. The board must state well in advance what it wants to achieve, otherwise there can be no basis for assessment. Without goals and mileposts against which to judge where a board has been and how far it has come, there can be no true evaluation.

Evaluation takes time, understanding, and commitment. There must be trust between board members, good faith, sensitivity, and respect for one another. If your evaluation effort is based on these qualities, and board members focus on improvement (rather than on criticism or finger-pointing), the board can make self-evaluation one of its most productive and rewarding activities.

"One good approach is to combine the evaluation of the superintendent with that of the board and its policies."
—Board member, Mississippi

STEPS TO SELF-EVALUATION

1. Recognize the need for self-evaluation.
2. Decide on the evaluation process to be used.
3. Select or develop an evaluation instrument.
4. Have board members individually respond to the instrument. (If desired, have the superintendent, key administrators, other school employees, and other school constituents rate the board, as well.)
5. Tabulate and report the survey conclusions. (One good way to do this is to chart the composite responses on a graph to get a clear picture of board strengths and weaknesses.)
6. Decide how the board will improve weak areas and set new goals.

The board president's post

***"It is the board president who sets the tone for the board meetings, creates the first impression that those in attendance may have of the board, has the primary contact with the media, and who is responsible for the operation of the board."* —Member, NSBA Board of Directors**

No chapter on board leadership would be complete without a section on the role of the school board president.

One common view of the board president's role is quite narrow: The president runs the school board meetings and must be able to do this well. An effective board president does much more. The board president must be a good leader, navigator, planner, organizer, communicator, interpreter, confidant, liaison, conscience, caretaker, and troubleshooter.

As one Illinois board member explained: "A board is an association of persons desiring to accomplish something together. The president must provide the leadership vitality for getting the best out of the individuals. He must have a capacity for clarifying generalization, and the ability to articulate aims and goals; to grasp the importance of community and public relations; and to be constructive rather than exploitive. There is a need for sensitivity and compassion; a bearing of confidence, trust, and respect; and genuine friendliness."

NOW, HERE'S MY PLAN . . .

A former board president added: "Board presidents are human and, therefore, are motivated by many things, including power and status. But their role also demands that they have some sterling qualities: wisdom, tact, good judgment, knowledge, and charm, among others."

Regrettably, many board members hold the narrow view of a board president's role when selecting a board president or seeking the job themselves. As one school leader said, "A board member who lusts for the presidency to obtain the power of the office without positive thought or instructive leadership capability dooms a board to disaster if successful in his or her quest."

How your board president operates will depend on his personal style and skills, and on the way he and the rest of the board perceive the role of the board president. It also will depend on the degree to which the superintendent assists and influences the president on school board operations and district issues.

Before anyone can perform the many roles of an effective board president, he must understand them. Here's a closer look at some of them:

President as planner. Effective and detailed planning, both short-range and long-range, is a must for the leader of the school board. *Short-range planning* includes everything from helping to plan the board agenda to planning the orientation process for new board members.

In an NSBA convention clinic, a New Hampshire board president explained: "Usually there is a period of time between election of board members and the time of actually taking part in board meetings. The board president and superintendent should decide the agenda for the orientation process and set the format. "If there are a number of candidates running for the board, you (as board president) might wish to start the orientation process early and have an orientation for candidates."

Advising new board presidents, she suggested: "Early in your presidency, encourage not only new members, but others also, to share their concerns with you. This helps you and your board to know each other better, establishes open relationships, and minimizes hidden agendas."

***"Effective board presidents don't just happen. For one thing, usually they have been an effective board member."* —Board member, Minnesota**

***"Being an effective board president is easy. Just use my simple 3P system: PLAN, PREPARE, AND PRAY."* —Board president, Minnesota**

"A really effective board president is always planning ahead. Someday, when someone else has to take over, if he has done his job well, he will have groomed his successor."
—Board president, Kentucky

Long-range planning involves the goals that have been set for the school district. A board president will want to take an early, overall look at the year ahead. He should ask: "In the coming year, what plan of action will be in place to reach district goals?" "What kinds of reports will the board need as the year progresses?" And, "How will I, the rest of the board, the administration, and the public judge whether the work toward these goals is on target?"

President as organizer. The effective board president can run meetings in an orderly fashion. To do this, he should have a working knowledge of board policy, a firm grasp of the agenda for each meeting, a command of parliamentary procedure, and some sixth sense of how to use these tools to keep the meeting going smoothly. He must be able to encourage the open exchange of ideas while continuing to drive for conclusions and decisions.

One board president claims: "I never have trouble running a meeting. People know and respect the rules. Sometimes we have a good battle, but if a situation gets to be tense, I *know* it needs either to be studied further or voted upon and gotten out of the way."

Inherent in this statement is the suggestion that a board president shouldn't shy away from allowing hearty deliberation by board members. At the same time, this does not mean you should have interminable discussion on everything. The chair must be able to judge when a discussion has ceased to be productive, draw it to a close, and call for decision. It does mean that the board should not appear to the public to be a rubber stamp for every administrative recommendation; or that the board has reached all its decisions beforehand; or that the board doesn't do much thinking about the district's business.

In the words of one board member: "It's the board president's task to reach a happy medium, to decide when a sufficient number of details have been discussed, and when it's time to reach a decision or go on to other matters. If you're a board president and have a sense of humor—and I sure hope you do—this is a good place to use it."

President as delegator. Closely related to board organization is the board president's ability to delegate. In states that allow working committees of the board, board presidents must make committee appointments. To do this, a president must know the strengths, weaknesses, interests, and natural talents of his fellow board members, and assign committee chairmanships in light of these qualities.

"Bakken, would you mind heading-up another committee?"

A part of making committee assignments is making sure that committee responsibilities are clearly spelled out, and that reporting procedures are clearly understood. The president also must see to it that time for discussion of committee reports is secured on the board agenda.

The president as liaison and confidant. The board president must serve as a liaison between the board and the superintendent. It is not reasonable to assume that every board member will love the superintendent and that the superintendent will adore every board member. The board president, though, can help foster a feeling of mutual trust and respect by interpreting board action to the superintendent and vice versa.

As with the head of any business or organization, the job of the superintendent often is a lonely one. At a minimum, the board president should share all information and correspondence with the superintendent that involves school operations. But the president can, and usually does, go much farther—offering the superintendent support, serving as a sounding board, giving constructive criticism when needed, and helping him to analyze individual and community reactions to district actions.

In turn, the superintendent can keep the board president up-to-date on all phases of the school district. It is important for the board president to fully communicate this information to the rest of the board. One board president

"Board presidents and other board members are lay representatives of the public—not substitute superintendents and principals." —Board president, New Hampshire

felt so strongly that she shouldn't know more of the "inside dope" than the rest of her board colleagues that she requested the superintendent to send to the other board members copies of all correspondence and information sent to her as president. "All of us are elected with an equal mandate from our communities," she explained, "so all of us should have equal access to the same information."

"You think this is rough? I used to be a school board president!"

President as caretaker of relationships. The board president is in an excellent position to help foster good relationships between the board and the staff, the board and the press, the board and the public, the district and other community and government organizations, and among board members themselves.

The president can encourage board recognition of staff accomplishments and two-way communications with school employees. He can ensure that members of the community feel welcome at board meetings and that they have access to the board. He can maintain communications with other community leaders and government officials, and can serve as a board spokesman to the press. The president can set the *tone* of board member relationships by speaking of the need for cooperation and mutual respect, and by allowing for diversity of opinion.

It has been said that a school board president needs "a tough hide over a very sensitive soul," and, "the ability to predict and weather storms."

Some presidential veterans would lead you to believe that the experience of being a board president is mostly bad. As one said, "Everybody on the board should have to be president at least once. Everyone should have their share of the ulcers."

Another board member said, "One would assume that being a school board president is the great chance to be in the community 'limelight.' Unfortunately, when the 'light' is on you, all it generally does is give the critics a target which is easier to hit."

It's true that the board president's post isn't for just everyone; but there are benefits. People who have been the president of a school board say they liked it for the opportunity it gave them to develop a close working relationship with the superintendent and staff. The greater demand for the president to become directly involved with program development can also be rewarding.

Board presidents also find satisfaction in having an acute awareness of what's going on in the schools and from being known as the leader of the board. Being board president carries a certain clout with other community leaders. For people who enjoy responsibility, the board presidency is considered a prime position to hold.

PRESIDENTIAL PITFALLS

- Not following parliamentary procedure. If the board president doesn't control discussion, someone (or no one) else will.
- Not following the agenda. This is the surest way to spring surprises on the superintendent and to make hasty board decisions.
- Selecting a place at the board table where some members and others in the board room cannot see the chair.
- An over-active ego which succumbs to the lure of power. This can lead to taking actions for the sake of popularity or expediency.
- Inability to harmonize divergent board member views.
- Permitting the overbearing personalities on the board to appear to represent the entire board's view.
- Not asking for the superintendent's recommendations *before* requesting a vote.
- Not being prepared to break a tie. Breaking a tie can become a nightmare for presidents who are unprepared. They can avoid some of the problems of tie-breaking by studying the issue carefully, by not being caught unaware, and by not making speeches about their votes.
- Assuming that a vote is unanimous, and not asking for ayes and nays. Some votes can get lost this way, and some ill-feeling can result.
- Inconsistency.
- Not taking the time to meet and talk with the superintendent about matters which will be presented to the board.
- Failing to resist the omnipresent temptation to become the superintendent.
- Not planning for crises.
- Not being prepared to be the spokesman for the board.
- Using educational jargon when they speak.
- Not taking the time to reflect on the most compelling and urgent obligations confronting the board, ordering these thoughts creatively and constructively, and sharing them with the board and superintendent.
- Misusing or over-using executive sessions.

5

THE BOARD AS DECISION MAKER

The English language has several idioms describing how some people make decisions: "by the seat of the pants," "playing it by ear," "on the fly," "acting first, thinking later." When called upon to make a decision, most people rely heavily on their past experiences, feelings, emotions, and attitudes.

For board members, other things also come into play:

- Board politics.
- Whether the board member was appointed or elected.
- Whether the member was elected at-large or to represent only precincts or sections of the district.
- Ties to special interest groups.
- Who recruited the board member: the superintendent, other incumbent board members, or community groups opposed to an incumbent.
- The board member's campaign rhetoric.
- Whether the board member is running for reelection and, if so, is challenged or unopposed.

A rational procedure is needed

To help balance the influence of past experiences, personal biases, and political needs on your decisions (you will never *eliminate* these), your board will need to follow rational decision-making procedures. You will need to apply logic and common sense; reliable information and advice; thought and vision; and, above all, concern for the children who are entrusted to the school system for educational development.

"Good working relations may well depend upon understanding one another's perspectives in making decisions, and understanding one's own perspectives as well."
—Board member, Illinois

"Whether I depend on my own judgment or on what others tell me depends on the issue and how much I think I know about it."
—Board member, Wisconsin

The process of decision making

There are hundreds of models for making decisions. Each of the nation's business experts promotes his own version of a process "that works." Inherent in most approaches are the following decision-making steps which board members have found to be practical and necessary:

Define the problem

Sometimes boards debate an issue for hours, only to learn in the end that everyone wasn't debating the same problem.

For starters, the issue should be clearly stated in a motion or resolution on which the board will be asked to vote. If it isn't clear to you, ask that the problem be rephrased or reconstructed. You can help by asking questions such as, "Is this really the issue?" or "Is this really what we have to make a judgment on?" The chairman and the maker of the motion should take the lead in sharpening the board's perception of a problem and keeping debate focused on the issue requiring a decision.

Gather information

Good decisions require accurate facts in sufficient quantity to inform the board of the true nature of a problem. Solid information can also form the foundation for alternative solutions and provide the basis for choosing the best option.

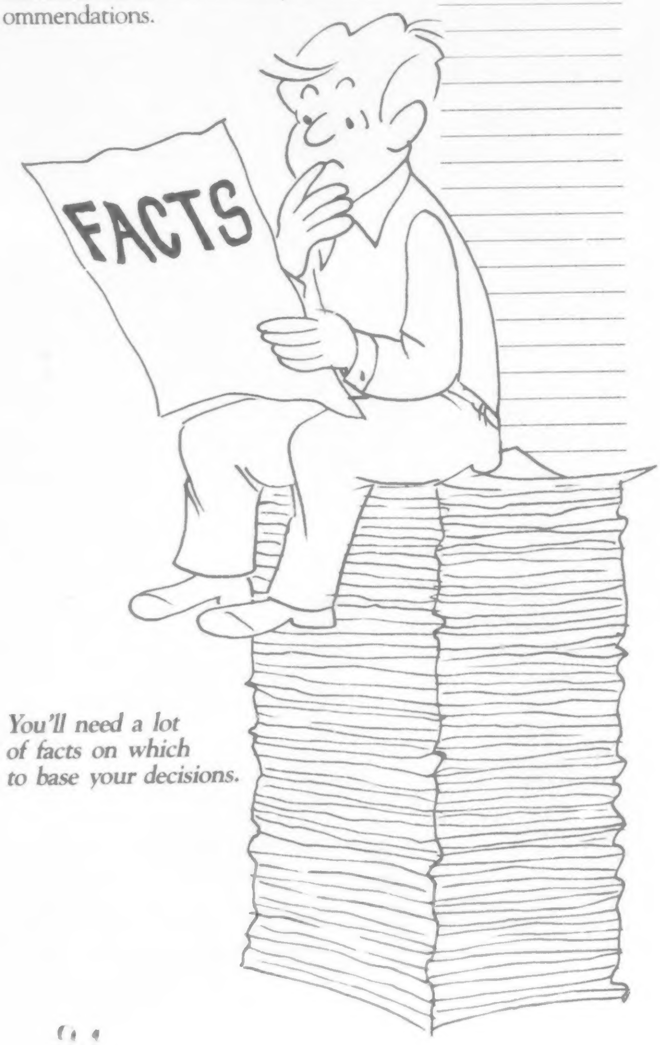
In many instances, the superintendent will provide you with the background of the problem and briefings on the ramifications of alternative solutions. The superintendent and his staff should usually be your primary source for facts, figures, concepts, and alternatives. An effective superintendent sums up relevant information in brief, readable memoranda; providing detailed documents only when necessary or requested. He is the channel through which other persons and agencies may bring you the information you need.

The superintendent's specialized staff (such as the school nurse, psychologist, librarian, statistician, public information officer, and business manager) can provide a wealth of information. Teachers and principals are invaluable sources of facts about grade organization patterns, report cards, class size, problems for the gifted and talented, bilingual education, and hundreds of other topics.

Other means of developing and acquiring data are:

Board committees. Committees and subcommittees of the board, assigned to consider special topics, often become expert in finding and compiling facts. Board committees on curriculum, personnel, transportation, and finance can generate and organize masses of data which can be useful to the entire board.

Citizen committees. Many of these committees, including citizen planning and advisory committees, develop machinery for getting facts. Their reports to the board may bring fresh and useful information, as well as analysis and recommendations.



You'll need a lot of facts on which to base your decisions.

"Too often we block out useful approaches to our decisions because we are satisfied with the one answer, or the best solution. We need to ask the superintendent to come up with more than one choice."
—Board member, California

Associations and agencies. There are groups within the borders of your school district and other school districts which generate a rich variety of data. There are the heart and lung associations (with facts about smoking); tax assessor groups (with facts about property values); trade associations (with facts useful for planning career programs for students); business and management associations (with facts about economic trends affecting your district). Officials of these frequently underutilized sources are usually glad to supply your district with the information they develop.

Your state agency for education. Your superintendent relies on the state education department or agency for many of the facts he provides to the board. The extent and variety of the state agency's resources may surprise you. One way to find out more about them is to invite a state education official to meet with your board to describe them.

School boards associations. One of the best resources for information, especially on issues arising out of state law, regulations, or practice, is your state school boards association. National organizations, like the National School Boards Association, can provide data gathered nationwide.

You, yourself. Board members at times overlook their own expertise and ability to uncover facts. This is not a suggestion that you become a researcher or a self-proclaimed expert. It is a suggestion that, through reading, thinking, listening, observing, and asking questions, you can gather useful data to help you make decisions.

Get the superintendent's recommendation; consider alternatives

You and your board colleagues are entitled to recommendations from the chief executive officer. Usually, along with a recommendation, the superintendent will submit alternatives. Even if you do not always agree with or follow the superintendent's recommendation, you should consider it carefully and weigh it against the available alternatives.

Get a second opinion

If a problem is complex and the consequences wide and deep, outside "second opinions" can be sought from consultants, specialists, community and business leaders, state and national school boards associations, board members in neighboring districts, and other elected officials. This additional dialogue may help your superintendent formulate his recommendation, and can assist the board in reaching a decision.

DECISION
DECISION
DECISION
DECISION

You'll face a variety of decisions at every board meeting.

Forecast consequences

This is where vision comes in. Look beyond a decision to see how it will affect other school programs and issues. Ask the administration and others who care about the schools or who have particular knowledge, "What will be the effects of this decision?" You and the board will want to know:

- ○ What can be gained or lost?
- ○ Who will be affected, directly and indirectly?
- ○ What other programs or issues will be affected?
- ○ What will be the actual cost?

Check proposed decisions against values, goals

If your board has taken the time and effort to establish goals and objectives for the schools, you will want to make sure that your tentative decision will be in harmony. Will you be able to "live with" your decision? Will you be proud of it, as an individual and as a trustee of the community's educational system?

Often, a decision can be clinched when the answer appears to be, "Yes, this is for the greatest good of the largest number of children." or "Yes, this decision will promote good education."

Decide, determine, settle, conclude, resolve

Casting your vote yea or nay is something you will do at every regular board meeting. How your board manages its meetings, board dynamics, board policy, and the abilities of the board's president all will affect the quality of board deliberations and decisions.

"In matters of principle, stand like a rock. In matters of taste, swim with the current." —Thomas Jefferson, former school board president

When it is time to end debate and vote, these are some general rules of thumb by which veteran board members abide:

○ Be as fully informed as possible.

○ When it is time to act and to vote, *do so.*

○ Vote on conviction, not on emotion. If the debate was heated, for instance, put aside personal feelings and base your vote on what's best for the schools.

○ Because there are several sides to every issue, you are not going to be able to please everyone. If you have done your homework, and you think you have made the right decision, don't agonize over it. Cast aside doubts, regrets, and guilt feelings and prepare for the next decision.

○ When your colleagues vote in opposition to your vote, keep in mind: "Individual choice, mutual respect."

○ Once the majority has made a decision — even if you weren't in the majority — stick by it.

"I don't recall ever making tradeoffs for my vote, but I can't say that I never will. I don't condemn it." —Board member, Nebraska

Causes of poor decisions

There is no magic formula which you and your board can apply to avoid making poor decisions. However, it will be helpful to remember these five known causes of poor decisions:

Lack of time. Nearly all questions brought before a board for action require time. To place an item on the agenda and to expect the board to act on it without adequate advance notice is to invite poor decisions. Members need time to study the question, the public should have time to react to it, and the superintendent and staff should have time to provide information and recommendations.

Poor information. Ample and accurate information is a key ingredient in making decisions. Without such information, results are almost certain to be inadequate. Many decisions require information from legal staffs, the state education agency, the administration, or the public. The board should see to it that it gets all the information it needs.

Often however, a board can have too much information or the wrong sources. Individuals with vested interests may flood the board with biased and slanted information. Some groups submit information labeled "official," which is nothing of the sort.

Acting under pressure. A board which is not prepared to handle pressure as it is engaged in making decisions is almost certain to make poor ones. The board will have to become skillful in differentiating pressure from objective advice or counsel.

Pressure comes from lobbyists, organized special interest groups, and influential taxpayers, businessmen, and labor leaders. There can be pressure from members of the educational community, such as teachers or coaches. The board chairman, a committee chairman, or a group of determined board members also can generate pressure from within the board. The superintendent also can put the heat on the board to decide an issue his way.

Pressure can be of the slow, subtle type; or it can erupt suddenly — for example, when irate citizens storm into the board room with an ultimatum, "Decide it our way, or else. . . ." You must learn to recognize and deal with both types of pressure in order to make good decisions on tough issues.

Emotionalism. When debate on an issue gets hot, and emotions rather than facts and reason take over, poor decisions are almost a sure bet. Neither individuals nor a group can think clearly when gripped by anger, fear, suspicion, or partisanship. When emotionalism dominates the discussions, it is wise to speak up: "Mr. Chairman, I move we postpone discussion to a later date. . . ."

Failure to consider consequences. The decision you make today will have consequences tomorrow, and possibly for a long time. If you are to make a wise decision, you have to look ahead at the possible effects of your action. How will it affect the budget? Staff relations? Parents and their attitudes? Failure to consider what will happen after your decision leads to many a poor decision. However, you may safely rely on this rule of thumb: If the decision is likely to benefit students, it is probably a good one.

HOW OFTEN DOES YOUR DISTRICT USE THESE MEANS FOR GETTING INFORMATION?

Your answers will reveal where or how often your board is missing an information-gathering opportunity.

	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Communication with other school districts in the state	☐	☐	☐	☐
Communication with other school districts in the nation	☐	☐	☐	☐
Needs assessment	☐	☐	☐	☐
Local public opinion polls	☐	☐	☐	☐
Visits to other school districts in the state	☐	☐	☐	☐
Visits to school districts in other parts of the country	☐	☐	☐	☐
Brainstorming sessions with specialists, board members, and citizens	☐	☐	☐	☐
Your state or national school boards association	☐	☐	☐	☐
Your state education agency	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other? (List)	☐	☐	☐	☐
______________________	☐	☐	☐	☐
______________________	☐	☐	☐	☐
______________________	☐	☐	☐	☐

Just what is a 'divided board' and how does it affect decision making?

A *divided board* was not included in the earlier list of "causes of poor decisions." However, depending on how you define it, a divided board can be a detriment to decision making.

On the other hand, no board is going to be unanimous all the time. Having differing views and votes is healthy and essential to good decisions. If your board has a unanimous vote on everything most of the time, it may lose its credibility with the public. The community needs to know that each board member has strong convictions and a variety of approaches to problems. Each board member must be able to express his own convictions and understand alternatives.

The difference between being diverse and being divided

A board searching for alternatives is not the same thing as a divided board. A divided board occurs when:

- ○ Votes almost always split along factional lines, regardless of the issue.
- ○ Its members have deep philosophical differences about the way the schools should be run.
- ○ It allows personality conflicts, political considerations, and personal needs to guide its decisions.
- ○ It does not understand or exercise teamwork.

The number one divider of boards, according to some board members, is one or more board members with an ax to grind. As one explains: "With a

"We like to give our community as much security as possible by showing visibly that we are not divided." —Board president, Colorado

three-person turnover in board members every year, and with very low levels of tenure on a board, many board members have a priority of fulfilling their personal goals and campaign promises. These often don't line up with the district's goals. If new board members fail to learn good boardsmanship, they become frustrated, and you get a split board.'"

A split is often unintentional

Often a split on a board will occur accidentally. Board members are left wondering: What happened?

According to one state association official who consults regularly with boards in trouble, "School boards often are not as far apart on actual decisions as they think. They get divided because they don't talk to one another, they make assumptions, they hurry through issues, and they go off mad. Their philosophies actually may differ; but when it comes down to a decision, they often are much closer than they realize."

Problems caused by board dividedness

The end result of a divided board can be poor communications and poor decision making. Here's one board member's observation:

"Boards that are divided don't always discuss options. The majority deliberates, and the minority fights an uphill losing battle. If the board is having major problems, the same problems may come to be reflected in the administration. Factions often develop within the administration in support of the various factions of the board."

One of the biggest problems of the divided board comes from how it is seen by the community and the press. Board members who are not truly *divided*, but who *are* diverse, feel it is essential that they let the public know they are united on basic issues. "It's important that the community understand that we function as a board, and not as separate, warring individuals," one board member explains.

A board member from Wisconsin cautions that if you are from a split board and have a community that watches for board dissension, you'd better think twice about telling "your" individual story, or "your" side of an issue to the press. "If the press can find a split board, they really love it.…Most of our decisions are 5-0, but the press only reports on the decisions that are 3-2."

"If you have a split board and you want to avoid headlines that report dissension, don't let emotions rule your decisions or your mouth." —Board member, Florida

Some advantages of split boards

Sometimes boards which are initially divided learn to work together. In such cases, they have a greater ability to discuss issues in depth, and better decisions result.

The members of divided boards are rarely accused of conspiracy or lack of diversity. They can seem to be representing the views of all segments of the public. No matter what side a community member takes, there is someone on the board who shares his views.

Some cures for the divided board

Most school leaders agree that a divided board generates more problems than benefits. It's been said, "If a board can't take care of its own matters, people will question its ability to take care of an entire school district." Here are some tips for mending torn relationships:

○ Practice the art of compromise. This valuable skill is often difficult to develop, but the boards which get the most done are the ones which know they have a mission to accomplish together and are willing to compromise to accomplish it.

○ Define your mission as a board through short and long-range planning. Commitment to big plans may reduce petty differences.

- ○ Elect a board president who has the ability to lead the group toward unity and cohesion.
- ○ Ask two or more board members from other school districts to sit in on your board meetings and later relate their perceptions of your board's stumbling blocks.
- ○ Get a third party or an impartial observer (such as a consultant or a representative from your state or national school boards association) to help the members of your board work out their differences.

Should a consultant help you decide?

There comes a time in the life of a school board when a member asks: "Should we hire a consultant to help on this issue?"

When the board decides the district needs new insights and ideas to deal with especially difficult problems, or when it needs the advice and presence of a third or impartial party, it is time to consider the employment of a consultant. Needs assessment, goal setting, long-range planning, low achievement in student reading, school closures, plans for a referendum, curriculum revision, alternative education, policy manual compilation or revision, board member or staff development, and the need for a new superintendent are among the issues that may call for outside expert assistance.

A board's policy on the use of consultants should not list the specific areas on which the district would call in a consultant, but should describe the kinds of assistance which might be sought from consultants, such as:

- ○ Conducting fact-finding studies.
- ○ Providing counsel or services requiring special expertise.
- ○ Assisting the board in developing policy and program recommendations.
- ○ Providing specialized or expanded resources to assist the board in completing a project or study.

Questions to answer before hiring a consultant

Before your board decides to employ a consultant, you and your colleagues should consider these questions:

"Should we get a consultant on these student disruptions?"

Is there a real need for a consultant? It is prudent to explore the talents and resources of the school staff, community leaders, and citizen groups before engaging outside help.

Do you have authority to hire? A policy statement, properly developed and approved, will suffice in most instances. Check budgetary limitations and requirements to make certain the district has sufficient funds for the job.

Have you defined the specific problem you want help on? Carefully delineate the area of operation for the consultant. Don't hire a consultant to "turn things around," "improve the educational climate," "charge up the staff," or to accomplish some other vague task. Your board policy on consultants might go as far as to state that "the board shall not contract for general, undefined services or studies."

Does the superintendent support the proposal to bring in a consultant? A consultant rarely will succeed unless he can work cooperatively with the superintendent.

Will the consultant be accepted by the teachers, administrators, and others with whom he must work? The people who will be affected by the consultant's work should play a role in setting the criteria for the selection.

How will the consultant be selected? A board subcommittee or the superintendent should draw up the qualifications and talents the board seeks; search procedures (advertising, reference samples of work for other districts, and other requirements for proposals); and the machinery for interviewing candidates.

How will you contract with a consultant? After preliminary discussions with the board or its representative, most consultants will submit a proposal to the board for approval. Once a proposal has been accepted, a first draft of a contract may be written by the superintendent, the district's attorney, or a board subcommittee — with the guidelines set by board policy. The proposal and the final contract should cover:

- The specific assignment or project in clear and specific language. If the proposal is written in general terms, make sure that the contract relies on more precise language.
- To whom the consultant will report.
- An estimate of the number of hours, days, or weeks the consultant should have to work in order to complete the contract.
- The fee and the basis on which it is calculated.
- The nature and form of the final product.
- Whether the cost of related expenses, such as travel, secretarial services, telephone, printing, and duplication will be borne by the district or the consultant.

The contract should also specify or control the consultant's right to deal with the press or to make public statements before civic groups. Before the contract is executed, have it reviewed by your school attorney.

SUGGESTION

Do not expect a consultant to solve all your problems. The best a consultant can do is to provide the board, the administration, and the staff with ideas, facts, procedures, and other resources for the district to use in solving its problems and in making decisions.

Putting a school attorney to good use

When most school board members are asked, "In which situations do you *insist* that your school attorney become involved?" the instant response is usually: "When we get sued!" After further contemplation, some board members expand the list of mandatory consultations to include major contract negotiations, adverse actions, and other instances where the board's legal posture is a major factor.

Waiting for a summons requiring the school system to appear in court, or waiting until you have an already out-of-control legal problem, are obvious examples of failing to make the most efficient use of a school attorney's services. It is also false economy.

"A good school lawyer can help the board spot trouble before it happens."
—Board member, California

Good advice costs a lot; no advice can cost more

No one who has ever hired an attorney can ignore the fact that good lawyers charge premium rates. Fees of $100 per hour or more are not uncommon among members of the legal profession whose services are in great demand. Few school boards have enough fat in the budget to justify large expenditures for "routine" legal advice. But it is important to remember that the most expensive lawyer, no matter what part of the country you're in, is the lawyer who has just walked into a courtroom to defend a lawsuit.

A TV commercial for oil filters makes a relevant point: A grease-smudged mechanic leans out from under a car perched on the service station rack. "This car's engine needs a major overhaul, and it's going to cost $1,500! If the owner had spent five bucks to put in a new oil filter when the oil was changed, he probably could have avoided all this expense," observes the mechanic, shaking his head. After urging viewers to purchase a new oil filter periodically as a means of prevent-

"A school attorney cannot pretend to be an educator, but can advise the board and the administration on the legal aspects of educational decisions. Conversely, board members and school administrators should think twice before making decisions which have legal implications." —Superintendent, Colorado

ing costly major repairs, the wrench-waving mechanic warns, "You can pay me now…or you can pay me later!"

Like an oil filter, some thoughtful legal advice before a legal *matter* becomes a legal *problem* can often save a school system considerable time, headaches, and money in the long run.

Board decisions and lawsuits

A careful examination of most of the lawsuits filed against school districts indicates that most school law litigation is related, directly or indirectly, to board decisions.

Direct challenges to policies adopted or actions taken by school boards usually result from the *implementation* of those decisions or policies by school officers or employees.

Indirect challenges often result from an administrative action taken in the *absence* of clear policy guidelines from the board or the failure of a board to make a decision on an important issue.

SUGGESTION

If your board policies haven't had a good "check-up" in several years, ask your school lawyer to look them over. This doesn't have to be expensive. Don't just give a "blank check" request. Ask for a "flat fee" proposal for reviewing the policies and making specific recommendations, or get a firm estimate of the time required and the projected cost.

Don't rely on a board member who is a lawyer

In addition to the old adage, "A lawyer who handles his own case has a fool for a client," there are two other good reasons for *not* relying on a board member or superintendent who is also an attorney. First, there is an obvious conflict of interest (mixing legal advice with politics and policy positions). In addition, most lawyers are not trained in school law. A lawyer who keeps abreast of statutes, regulations, and court cases related to public education can find them more quickly and cheaply. Retained counsel is also accountable to the board for legal advice, unlike a fellow board member.

Keep lawyers in their place on board decisions

Lawyers are not policy makers. Determining what decision a board should make is solely within the discretion of board members. The major advisor in such matters should be the superintendent and his staff. The temptation to take an attorney's advice as the "law" may be great for some board members, but should be avoided. The proper role for a school lawyer is to find the law related to a decision, explain it to the board, present options for decisions in light of legal considerations, and define legal problems which may arise as a consequence of board decisions.

Many school attorneys will let their advice stray from pointing out legal requirements and pitfalls to counseling the "right and wrong" of a particular issue. An important prerequisite for the proper use of a lawyer's services is to clearly establish the difference between legal advice and general advice on the substance of policy and other decisions.

The role of your school attorney is *secondary* when discussing *substance*. When the board meets to discuss a proposed decision, the initial meeting shouldn't even require the presence of counsel (unless, of course, the district has a lawyer on its staff). Once the board has developed its *position* on the substance of a proposed policy or decision, then the draft should be reviewed by a lawyer.

If a decision is treading on dangerous ground, the words and phrases of the final motion or policy may be carefully chosen to minimize the chance of a legal challenge. When the administration is forewarned about questions of law, it may be able to anticipate and avoid a lawsuit by more careful implementation of the policy.

The lawyer's *primary* role in advising the board on policy, contracts, and other written decisions is based on the need for *precision*. A vague or poorly written policy is hard to implement, is more likely to be subject to misinterpretation, and (in case of legal challenge) is less able to withstand legal criticism. A good school lawyer can help put the substance of a board's decision into clear, unambiguous language. Sometimes the legal viability of a rule can rest on the meaning of one or two words, or the structure of a key phrase. The right wording is more often found in a lawbook, legal journal, or court decision than in a thesaurus.

Finding the right lawyer: caveats and tips

It would be comforting to be told that attorneys are universally good writers, but this is simply not true. Some law-

"Few school boards would enter into a million dollar contract for the building of a new school without having a lawyer review the papers. But these same boards often adopt policies and make decisions on tricky issues like adverse actions, reductions-in-force, corporal punishment, or student expulsions without any legal advice." —School attorney, District of Columbia

SCHOOL DISTRICT

"Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and become a member of your state and National School Boards Association Council of School Attorneys?"

yers are poor writers, caught up in the mistaken belief that the keys to good legal draftsmanship are complexity, verbosity, and more than occasional use of code words like "thereof," "whereas," and "herein." While it is true that legal writing is different from the prose of a novelist because, unlike the novelist, the lawyer wants everyone who reads his words to understand them in precisely the same way, there is a growing trend in the legal profession away from "legalese" to a "plain language" approach to draftsmanship.

When you've narrowed down the field of lawyers to those who are knowledgeable about school law, then, perhaps the next most important attribute to look for in a good lawyer is the ability to write precisely in clear plain English. Remember, if *you* can't understand what your lawyer writes, it is unlikely that most students, teachers, judges, or juries will be able to decipher it.

Remember, the lawyer your board selects *cannot* second-guess what the courts will do if the rule is challenged, *cannot* predict whether the board will be sued if it adopts a particular policy or course of action, and *cannot* close the door to lawsuits with advice or magic words.

An attorney who is knowledgeable about school law *can* be an invaluable resource. Although some board's legal advice comes from the city solicitor or county attorney's office, many more boards retain an attorney on a full or part-time basis.

How an attorney can help

An attorney who is well-versed in federal and state laws, regulations, and court rulings that affect public schools, can assist a board by:

- ○ Attending board meetings upon request to advise on the legality of board decisions as they are considered and made.
- ○ Reviewing board minutes to ensure that all board actions are legally sound.
- ○ Determining whether board meeting procedures comply with law.
- ○ Advising the board on the interpretation of statutes, charters, court mandates, contract language, and other technical matters of law.
- ○ Writing board policy in clear, precise English (not "legalese").
- ○ Reviewing the board's policy manual to ensure that all legal requirements have been addressed in policy and that existing policies are legally sound.
- ○ Advising the board in contract negotiations.
- ○ Reviewing all procedures relative to the employment of personnel.
- ○ Preparing or reviewing board invitations for bids, job specifications, and construction and other contracts.
- ○ Advising the board on due process procedures and the conduct of hearings.
- ○ Reviewing all procedures and regulations regarding the rights and responsibilities of students and pupil discipline.
- ○ Reviewing federal programs to determine what constitutes legal compliance.

TWO TIPS...

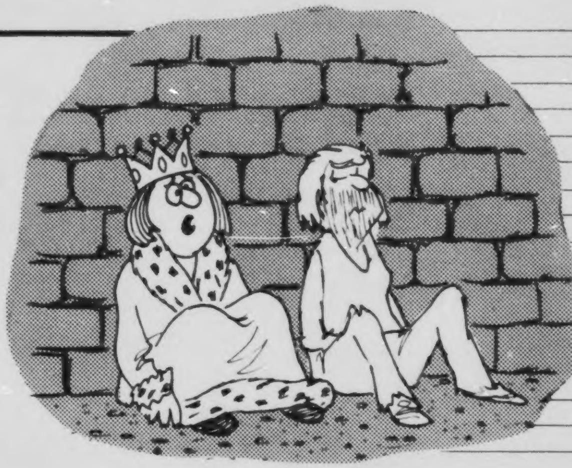
...on getting legal assistance

If your district doesn't have its own school attorney for budgetary or legal reasons (some state laws prohibit school boards from consulting with other than city or county attorneys), the door to expert legal advice still is not closed to your board or administration. Many state school boards associations or state education departments employ legal counsel and provide legal advice as a service.

...on improving the assistance you get

If your district does employ its own legal counsel, there's something your board can do to make sure your lawyer keeps on top of new developments in school law: Enroll him in the National School Boards Association's Council of School Attorneys (or make membership a condition of employment). The Council, organized in 1969, provides a national forum, publications, and special workshops on the practical legal problems school boards face. Many states also have school attorneys' organizations. Other professional groups, such as the National Organization for Legal Problems in Education (NOLPE), also provide information, seminars, and school law publications.

Who is liable?



"But I thought I could do no wrong!"

We live in an age of litigation. Lawsuits seeking damages for real and alleged wrongdoings are commonplace.

As a school board member, you are especially vulnerable. When it comes to liability suits, there always seems to be open season on school boards, board members, and employees of the board.

Protect yourself up front

The immediate advice for your board is:

○ Carry adequate liability insurance (and, perhaps, "errors and omissions" coverage) and make certain that the insurance policies specify clearly *who* is protected and *who* is the insured. If you can't afford a district insurance policy, seek out cooperative plans for purchase of policies with other districts.

○ Check with legal counsel about your potential liability under the laws of your state and recent court decisions and, especially, under the U.S. Civil Rights Act. This area of law has changed considerably in the last decade. Schedule a briefing session on this topic at least once a year, or when new decisions occur that affect board and board member liability.

○ Keep written school board policies under review and revise them as law and court decisions dictate.

"I wonder if it's possible to get the school board to declare long division cruel and unusual punishment?"

Liability starts with responsibility

As you and your colleagues step back and look at your position in the state and in the community, remember that you, individually and collectively, are responsible for everything that happens in the school system. Note the word is *responsible,* not *liable,* in this context.

The board member with a sense of statesmanship recognizes that what occurs in the classroom, front office, gym, lab, and school shop — any incident anywhere in which a student or district employee is involved — rebounds on the board. When good things happen, the board and its members accept the glory and the gratitude. When bad things happen, the board takes the flak.

The public holds boards and their members responsible, because everything that occurs in a school system is within the jurisdiction and responsibility of the board. When you and your board carry that sense of responsibility, you are also setting up, in some measure, protection against liability. As one school leader notes, "Prudent, sensitive, responsible actions are the best shields against liability suits."

"Although few board members have been held personally responsible for their decisions, board members should know that the law of the land says they can be held responsible for a 'misuse of power' and that for their actions they can be fined or jailed."
—School leader, District of Columbia

Liability is defined by law

There was a time, in the dim past, when suits against public officials were not permitted. In essence, since "the king could do no wrong," the sovereign and his minions could not be held accountable for their official acts. This was later transferred to mean that the state and its agents were immune from liability suits for actions performed as part of their jobs.

Immunity for public officials — even if partial, and only for restricted types

"To avoid getting sued, follow the law and make sure your policies and regulations reflect the law." —School attorney, Iowa

of cases — remained a fixture of our laws well into the 20th century. However, immunity of public bodies and public officials has been significantly eroded. The big break came in 1961, when the U.S. Supreme Court held that state and local officials (and this means board members) were not immune when their actions violated constitutional rights. The landmark case was based on a Civil Rights Act of 1871, which has been codified as section 1983, of Title 42 of the U.S. Code.

If you should hear lawyers talk about "1983," remember they are not referring to a year, but to federal statute. An amazing statute it is: More than 17,000 court decisions have involved section 1983, and more are still awaiting final rulings.

Since the law of liability that relates to school boards remains unsettled and subject to further clarification by the courts, it is always important to:

○ Get legal assistance in any case which may involve the rights of persons living under our Constitution (including non-residents of your state and non-citizens).

○ Seek protection in insurance policies.

○ Make sure your legal counsel is well versed in the latest court decisions.

○ Act prudently.

School lawyers warn school board members to act with especial caution and wisdom in cases involving:

○ Teacher discharge and nonrenewal of teacher contracts.

○ Student suspension and expulsion.

○ Censorship of publications, free speech, or association.

○ Maternity leave.

The great protection in cases of these types is due process of law. "It is usually better to afford more process than is due," according to one school attorney.

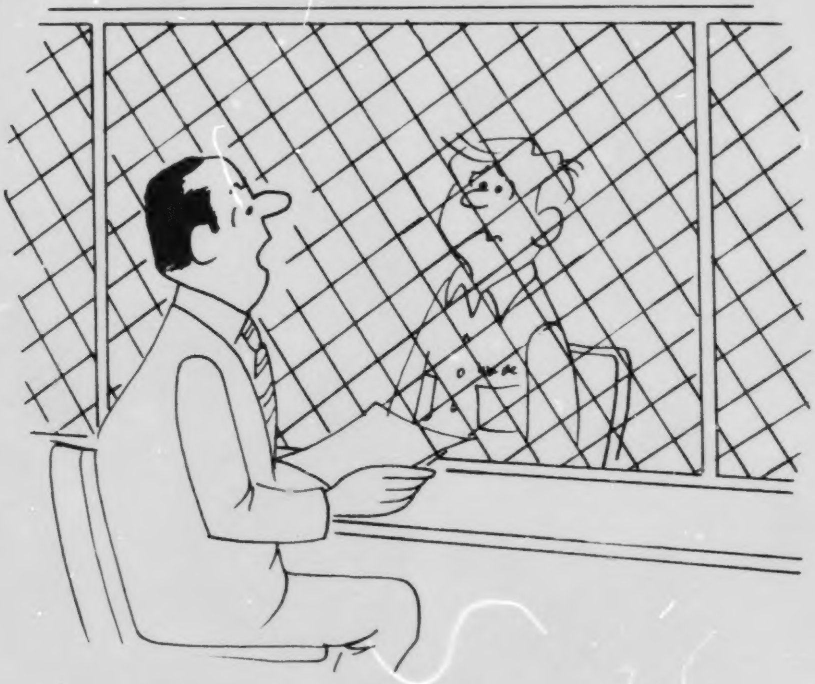
SUGGESTION

If your board is sued:

○ *Obtain proper legal representation.*

○ *Keep informed on how the case is progressing.*

○ *Refrain from making any statements that may reflect an opinion, bias, prejudice, attitude, or preconceived ideas. In a damage suit involving expulsion or termination, you may be asked to testify. Casual remarks may come back to haunt you.*



"Everything was going just fine until you busted out laughing during my summation to the jury!"

What you should know about committees of the board

Sometimes, the problems requiring board attention and action are so complex and numerous that the entire membership cannot deal with them. Increasingly, boards have turned to the use of board committees to explore and make recommendations on time-consuming problems.

The use of committees is a controversial practice. Nevertheless, in states where the law permits, many boards make extensive use of standing committees, special or temporary committees, committees of the whole board, and special subcommittees on special projects.

Board committees cannot and should not act for the board. Only the board, meeting with a quorum in a properly called session, is empowered to determine policy and make binding decisions on any issue. A properly directed board committee, however, can assist the full board in making better decisions.

Appointments to board committees usually are made at a board's annual organizational meeting. The number of board members assigned to a committee depends on the size of a board, the scope of the committee's jurisdiction, or the nature of the special project. The board president may work with the committee to help define its responsibilities.

During your service on the board, the board president may ask your preference for committee assignments, and you may be asked to chair a committee. You don't have to be an expert in a subject to be a committee member or even the chairman. In fact, committee work is one good way to *learn* more about an unfamiliar subject. All you need is interest and the time that the committee assignment will demand.

The use of standing committees

In the past, when professionally trained administrators were scarce and school boards had large memberships, standing committees assisted the administration in its daily responsibilities. As professional administrators have assumed the primary responsibility for managing the schools, and boards have become more concerned with establishing educational goals and policies, the arguments against using standing committees have grown.

The most frequently cited argument is that standing committees tend to usurp administrative responsibility and, therefore, interfere with the working relationship of the full board and the superintendent and his staff.

Another problem is that a standing committee can become considered so knowledgeable and powerful that the board becomes a "rubber stamp" for committee recommendations. If committee reports and recommendations are accepted or adopted by the board without discussion, for example, it may appear that the board is substituting the thinking of some of its members for the thinking of the entire group.

Some critics of standing committees also warn that these structures often provide a strong superintendent or special interest groups with a mechanism for manipulating board decisions. If your board uses full-time committees, make sure they operate to *facilitate* board decisions, not to avoid deliberation and determination by the full board.

Standing committees can serve an overburdened board, especially when used to deal with routine tasks. Common standing committees are those on:

- ○ *Curriculum* — to review proposals concerning student courses, to ensure the board's familiarity with district educational programs, and to review achievements and make evaluations.

- *Finance* — to monitor the fiscal activity of the district and interpret the superintendent's budgetary proposal and other recommendations to see that they promote the goals of the district.
- *Personnel* — to review the superintendent's recommendations for hiring.

The use of special committees

Special committees, also known as *ad hoc* or temporary committees, usually are assigned to accomplish a particular task in a certain amount of time, and are discharged when the task is completed. They are essentially fact-finding, deliberative, and advisory bodies which submit reports and recommendations to the board on specific issues. There can be as many special committees as there are school issues to study, but examples of special committees are those assigned to study the feasibility of placing computers in each classroom, or to recommend a new school insurance program.

The use of committees of the whole

The board also might meet as a committee of the whole to discuss matters of policy and to work on specific tasks. All board members who can attend meet to consider defined issues unencumbered by other topics or by a need to progress through a regular board meeting agenda.

Open meeting laws apply to most committee meetings, and *no official action can be taken at any of these meetings which are closed or held without public notice.* Sometimes committee members test community reactions or attempt to reach acceptable compromises by taking straw votes or voting to adopt findings and recommendations, which are then reported to the entire board in a regular meeting for official discussion and vote.

How to use citizen advisory committees

***"Board members who don't sit in on citizen committee meetings would be shocked at the amount of work that goes into making a recommendation."* —Board member, Georgia**

Boards are turning to the use of citizen advisory committees to help them make better decisions. Through such committees, a board can acquire additional information and, very possibly, support for the final decision on an issue. Opinions from a variety of constituents with diverse backgrounds and needs can give the board a sense of the community's pulse.

Boards commonly appoint citizen committees to:

- Study and make recommendations regarding district goals.
- Review district policies.
- Evaluate existing school facilities and make recommendations for these or future facilities.
- Examine the curriculum.
- Study human relations and district communication needs.
- Advise the board on any particular problem or task for which the board has a need for input.

Productive use of citizen advisory committees will flow from these factors:

- How committee members, especially the chairman, are selected or appointed.
- The responsibilities that are assigned to the group.
- The procedures under which they work.

Creating the citizen advisory committee

The creation of a citizen committee is an action for the board. There may be cases when the superintendent will decide he needs "an advisory group," and will proceed to set one up; but, according to some board experts, such

***"Senior citizens make excellent committee members. They have experience, they are interested in the community, and they have the time to do serious legwork and really find out about problems and possible solutions."* —Board member, Florida**

A diversified group of citizens can help the board take the community's pulse

"We don't have any trouble getting people on committees. The principals in each of our buildings ask for volunteers from the parents and they always get them. The problem is getting people off the committees." —Board member, Maryland

instances can lead to confusion, if not trouble. Also, a citizen committee created by board vote is likely to enjoy more status and influence than one created by the administration.

Determining committee make-up

Mix and balance of individuals is a good prescription for choosing members. It is axiomatic that these committees will:

○ Represent different aspects of the community.

○ Reflect a variety of philosophies.

○ Include not only the "prominent," but the "least likely to be heard from" as well.

Parents, grandparents, and single parents should also be considered for committee membership. The board should publicize its intent to form a committee and provide an opportunity for citizens to seek involvement in its membership.

Both generalists and specialists can be useful members, but be sure that one specialist on a citizen advisory committee does not pose problems by trying to "take over" the group or rigidly guide its deliberations.

Defining the committee's charge

A board motion creating a citizen advisory committee should include a statement outlining *clearly* what the board expects from the group. Is the committee's task to be of a very specific nature? Is it to be general and wide-ranging?

"We assure committee members that we are interested in their advice and concerns, but that we cannot be bound by them." —Board member, Colorado

The limitations placed on the committee must be openly stated at the outset, so that there is no misunderstanding about what a committee is to do, and what it is not to do. *Be sure to remind all members that they are acting in an advisory capacity only.* Make it clear that committee recommendations are not binding on the board.

Other aspects of citizen committee operations may need board direction. Should the committee have the right to replace members who resign? Should it have direct access to the press? What controls does the board want to place on the committee with regard to its public relations?

There should be little leeway about a citizen committee's lines of responsibility. The board should make clear to whom the committee and its officers are reporting: To the board? To the administration?

"Mr. Wilson, I understand you are chairman of the citizen's advisory committee on dress codes. . . ."

The board also should specify how the committee's findings are to be released. The committee may prepare interim conclusions, tentative proposals, majority and minority recommendations. If you and your colleagues are to work in peace and harmony with a committee, you will need to specify in writing the committee's right and power to make public such recommendations; or instruct the committee to channel them through the superintendent to the board.

Some board members say committee selection can head off potential problems by trying to be certain that persons chosen are interested in the topic to be studied by the committee and are willing to listen as well as voice their own opinions.

"I believe the committee report should be presented to the board at a public meeting. Since the exercise is a function of feedback, the board also should be prepared to respond to the committee's recommendations with some form of official reaction." —Board member, Arizona

Seeing that it works

The difference between useful and troublesome committees usually stems from methods of operation. If the board specifies a clear procedural structure for the committee, the chances for fruitful activity are increased.

The board can properly give the committee leeway on:

○ How it wants to organize itself.

○ What officers to have.

○ How often to meet.

○ What records to keep.

○ Whether it is to have subcommittees or study groups.

***"Time is one of the biggest pitfalls of working with citizen groups. You can expect delays, especially if community input is conflicting."* —Board member, Connecticut**

Subcommittees

Often subcommittees become more prominent and vocal than the parent citizen committee. It is prudent, therefore, for a board to specify how subcommittees are to be created and their members appointed. Similarly, the board should see to it that subcommittees know their responsibilities to the parent committee, the administration, and the board.

Thank you, that's it

There is rarely justification for a citizen advisory committee to go on and on. Its lifetime should be clearly specified when giving the committee its charge or in the original motion creating it. The board should also be explicit on methods for winding up the committee's work. The disposition of the committee's records is crucial at this point.

Some boards signal the official conclusion by presenting certificates or other "thank you" tokens to hard-working citizens at a board meeting.

***"You can maintain good working relationships with committees if the board has a record of responding to their work."* —Board member, Virginia**

Following up

The final report is in. What now? If the board simply files and forgets it, citizen participation in the solution of school problems will be a sham.

Appropriate follow-up for advisory committee recommendations include:

- Making them public, with or without board endorsement, for community discussion.
- Referring them to the staff and administration for evaluation.
- Referring them to board committees for study.
- Placing some or all of the recommendations on the board agenda for discussion and debate.

***"Sometimes citizen groups won't let go of an issue. They enjoy working on it, and want to continue working on it, even after they have turned in their recommendations."* —Superintendent, New York**

SUGGESTION

Your board can look at its citizen committees as "breeding grounds" for future candidates for seats on the board. It's common to find that committee members who do their work well often become interested in the schools and in board service. By the time they achieve election or appointment to the school board, they have valuable additional information about education and the process of school governance.

SOME DOS AND DON'TS OF WORKING WITH COMMITTEES

Do:

- Be sincere about working with the committee.
- Clearly define the goals and purposes of the committee. Determine whether your board is seeking advice or information, or both.
- Establish a specific time frame in which the committee is to complete its work.
- Select members of the committee reflecting the demographics of your community, i.e., sex, race, age, and geography. Consider other factors appropriate to the task of the committee, such as expertise, special interests, and previous committee or board experience.
- Provide staff support.
- Define the committee and its purpose in terms of its relationship to the district's staff. Involve the administration in structuring and assigning work for the committee, and in recommending staffing.
- Provide orientation and training for new committee members.
- Seriously evaluate the committee's work, findings, and recommendations. Then respond clearly.
- Maintain open communication with the committee. Advise it of board business. Have it report periodically to the board.
- Always take time to *officially* thank the committees when their work is completed.
- Publicize the findings and recommendations of committees and let the community know what the board plans to do about them.

Do not:

- Neglect your committees.
- Ignore advice offered by the committees, or good people will refuse to participate in the future.
- Adopt recommendations just for the sake of making the committee feel worthwhile.
- Allow the committee to overstep its relationship with the school staff. Committee members should never be allowed to intrude on the prerogatives of the administration.
- Dilute the purpose of committees by going overboard and appointing large numbers of committees or committees with too many members.
- Create conflict by assigning overlapping duties or tasks to different committees.

Making decisions during crises

> ***"Some boards claim they never make crisis decisions. It's all a matter of attitude, having an effective process for decision making, and sticking to it." —School administrator, Illinois***

If you have been on a school board for some time, you have already lived through many small crises and, possibly, one or two major ones. If you are new on the board, you may not know what crises to expect, the challenges they place upon a board, and the responses needed.

Types of crises boards face

Any school board, anywhere, at any time, may become involved in events which make clear thinking and calm deliberation difficult. Nevertheless, board members must continue to make decisions in the midst of fast-moving situations, such as:

Student protests and conflict. These may take the form of fighting in school and on campus, racially motivated melees, or mass non-violent disobedience and demonstrations.

"This school board's financial worries are over! We're out of money!"

Parent and citizen eruptions. People in the community may demonstrate against a proposed school closing or the firing of a favorite employee; or they might demand removal of a staff member, elimination of a school course or program, or elimination of certain texts or library books.

Financial crises. "We're out of money to run the schools," is a board finding that can signal long and involved crises for the district, bringing on criticism from the people, the press, the state department of education, municipal officials, and the business community.

Court orders. These may deal with segregation, equalization, busing, the imposition of heavy penalties on the board, or decrees for payment of damages.

Teacher strikes and job actions. With these may come picketing, curtailment or cessation of instruction, mud-slinging, polarization of community attitudes, angry parents, physical violence, threats to board members and other school personnel, and the intervention of courts and police.

There are also the risks of school fires, explosions, or panic of crowds at school events; as well as such acts of God as tornadoes and earthquakes. So varied are the possible crises that no one set of procedures for coping with them will do; except, perhaps, the obvious ones: "Stay calm," "Don't panic," and, "Act as mature and statesmanlike individuals."

A board's performance in a crisis demands more than simplistic approaches.

Perceiving a crisis can be tricky. Except for acts of God, upheavals, and disturbances, most crises do not arise suddenly. They fester. They are the result of silent discontent or long suffering. Regrettably, many boards perceive a crisis when there is none. They consider it a "crisis" if they have to make a quick decision to minimize a conflict or repair bad public relations. When a board holds this definition of crisis, it can find itself constantly making "crisis" decisions, which themselves can cause additional board-perceived crises. When false crises become the basis for board decisions, board meetings are usually characterized by constant conflict.

"Mr. Wilson, not to question your decision making during a crisis.... "

Before a crisis, when things appear smooth and normal, is the time to build defenses against trouble. To perceive a crisis before it develops, a board will need to be sensitive and alert to the mood of students, the attitudes of teachers, and the feelings of the community.

To find areas of deep-seated discontent, a board can conduct a needs assessment or a district-wide opinion poll, and analyze the views that citizens air at board meetings or in the press.

It is always prudent for a board to:

- ○ Insist on regular safety and fire inspections.
- ○ Have ready-to-use procedures with police.
- ○ Designate an official spokesman for the board during any crisis.

Above all, a board should keep written policies updated and easy to retrieve. This includes policies on *all* topics, because it is impossible to know which policy or procedure will be in question, which will be needed for legal defense of board actions, or which will be needed to guide board or administrative action.

During a crisis, immediately take stock of all sources of help. These may include municipal officials; state education officials; community, student, and faculty leaders; citizen groups, parents, and the administration.

Then:

- ○ Decide early in the crisis how much authority the board can and will delegate to the administration. Use the administration and whatever other professional assistance is needed to help make the best decisions and to handle the crisis. As necessary, rely on legal advice and employ negotiating agents, specialists in finance, consultants, risk managers, security personnel, human relations advisers, or whatever type of specialist you need to help you face the crisis.
- ○ Avoid executive sessions, closed sessions, and hurriedly called meetings unless absolutely necessary.
- ○ Keep records and minutes of all board activity.
- ○ No matter how great the pressure, don't neglect due process. Cutting legal corners may bring additional troubles later.
- ○ Solve problems one at a time and take your time with each. Don't succumb to the ever-present pressure to make instant decisions.
- ○ Make sure board policies do not conflict with one another and, when possible, make decisions based on existing policy.
- ○ Maintain confidentialities and mutual trust.

Forthrightness and honesty are essential during any crisis. Attempts at cover-up are wrong and often senseless. The press and the community should be provided with facts which will reduce rumors and can help build support for board decisions.

"There are few decisions a board has to make that can't just sit for awhile. If a parent makes a big issue out of a textbook that's been in use for months, it won't hurt to let it be used for another month while the board decides on the best procedure for handling the problem."
—Board member, North Dakota

"Confidentiality is needed more during a time of crisis than in any other time. If you don't have mutual trust during executive sessions, for instance, you can't investigate the facts. When you violate confidences, you destroy this mutual trust."
—Superintendent, Kansas

6

BOARDS AND SUPERINTENDENTS

"A board and superintendent united in their efforts to work together will produce the kind of school system our children deserve and the people of the community want."
—Board member, Kentucky

"United we stand, divided we fall."

When it comes to the relationships the members of a school board have with each other and with the superintendent, no more fitting words apply. The quality of these relationships directly affects the quality of education that is provided in a school system.

Since the laws of human nature also apply to the relationships of board members and school administrators, there are no two districts in which these relationships are alike. Accordingly, there are no pat formulas regarding how these relationships work or should work, what roles each should play, or what actions each should take.

Boards and superintendents both play leading roles in school districts. Their jobs are interactive, perhaps overlapping; their goals *should be* the same. School systems have these two entities at the top because, in the public schools of America, we have historically relied simultaneously on the wisdom of the electorate and on the wisdom of trained professionals. School districts work best through the efforts of *both* boards and superintendents, *when the system works.*

The ideal system: Boards govern, superintendents administer

In today's system, citizens elect boards that select superintendents. (There are exceptions — boards that are appointed and superintendents who are elected.) Further, most states have determined in law that citizens who sit on school boards are responsible for making school policies, and the professionals they hire are supposed to implement those policies.

Sometimes, the distinction between policy and administration is portrayed as if, somewhere, there were an authoritative definition that will serve all boards and superintendents everywhere. In practice, the relationship between board and superintendent differs from district to district; it differs on different issues within a district; and it may differ at different phases in the life of a particular relationship. The relationship may also differ according to local customs, personalities, state law, local policy, or the nature of the issues facing the district.

Nevertheless, in practice, there exists a real distinction between what boards do and what superintendents do, and the phrases "make policy" and "administer policy" are conventional terms for this distinction. What is important in a district is not that people use these terms, but that an understanding develops between each board and superintendent about their respective roles.

Easier said than done

If it were as easy to develop and maintain the relationship that boards and superintendents *should* have as it is to specify the relationship in law or to advocate the proper roles for each, many problems that exist today between boards and their chief administrators would not arise.

Across the nation, some boards and superintendents are locked in combat.

"Given the principle of local control, which implies a wide variation in the nature of the duties of the superintendent and the attitude of the local board to his role, is there any reason to expect or desire standardization?"
—Board member, Colorado

"Somehow, Miss Simpson, I have the feeling our school board doesn't like me!"

Boards are firing superintendents and hiring replacements who have been "let go" from other boards. Highly capable superintendents sometimes switch districts just to rid themselves of board-caused headaches.

Discord between boards and superintendents usually can be broken into these categories:

- ○ Poor understanding and communication regarding how much leeway the superintendent and staff have to meet their responsibilities.
- ○ An uncompromising difference between the majority of the board and the superintendent regarding education goals and strategies.
- ○ Disagreement between the majority of the board and the administration as to each other's authority and responsibilities.
- ○ Incompetency on the part of the superintendent, such as not giving board members adequate information or constant mishandling of staff.
- ○ Personality conflicts between some board members and the superintendent.

"An understanding between a board and superintendent requires constant attention; sometimes in open discussion in board meetings, during board self-evaluation, or evaluation of the superintendent; sometimes in written policies of the board; and often in the interpersonal relations of board members and a superintendent."
—Board member, Virginia

Some relationships may never work

In every book that has been written about school governance and administration, there's a new system advocated showing how boards and administrators can work together. But for some boards and superintendents, no theory or number of theories is going to make a difference. Some fundamental differences can *never* be resolved.

As one educator put it, "If six members of a nine-member board can't see eye-to-eye with their superintendent or just simply can't stand the way he wears his clothes, it may be a waste of everybody's time to go through all the procedures that are supposed to help promote good working relationships." At the same time, severing a poor board-superintendent relationship without *trying* to improve it often avoids facing underlying problems, and may lead to future problems.

"Stepping on one another's toes really hurts. You need to take steps to understand the roles of administrators and those of board members, or you'll find yourselves fighting one another."
—Board member, Indiana

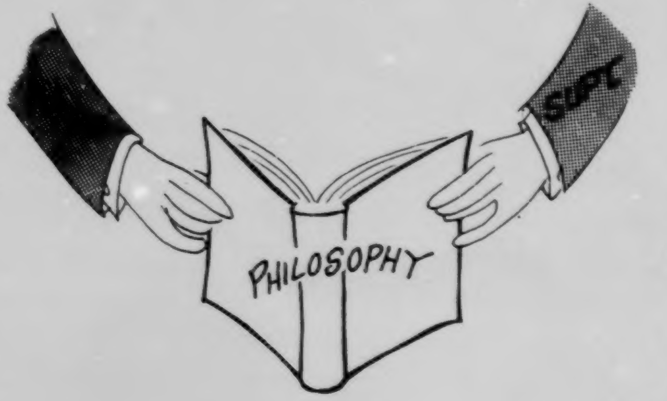
Relationships worth keeping require work

Hiring a new superintendent might not be the answer. If there are some philosophical differences, or if there is just a small minority of board members who cannot get along with the superintendent, there are some strategies for working together which can be implemented for the benefit of all parties, and for the betterment of the schools.

Reaching mutual understandings

The members of a board need to sit down, *by themselves,* to reach agreement on what their leadership role should be, and what the superintendent's role should be. Each board should also discuss this periodically with its superintendent, at least once every year or two, or as new board members arrive. One superintendent, who supports a periodic review and clarification of board-superintendent roles, explains: "This should not be an evaluation of the work of the superintendent, nor an evaluation of the work of the board. It should be an honest and candid discussion of the *functions* of each partner."

"Boards change, attitudes change, public expectancies change, militancy changes, perceptions change, and change changes. It is not reasonable to assume that roles and responsibilities outlined five years ago or even last year will constantly stay the same."
—Superintendent, Texas



> ***"According to the common wisdom, the school board sets policy and the superintendent and other administrators implement it. It's not that simple. Superintendents often help boards determine policy, and school board members frequently have a hand in major operational procedures."***
> ***—Board member, California***

Don't be rigid about division of responsibilities

When clarifying roles, boards should avoid too rigid a division of responsibility between the board and superintendent for managing the schools and adopt a philosophy that supports a board-superintendent "partnership in responsibility."

Today's board members are being held accountable for solving school problems. Accountability, to many constituents, does not mean that a problem posed urgently over the telephone at 10 p.m. should always be taken to the administration who will then deal with the problem and provide an appropriate response within a reasonable period of time. "What good does it do me to have a school board member who can't do anything about my problems?" they ask.

Since our society leans toward immediacy of response as a factor in accountability, board members must be better informed, more knowledgeable, and more involved than they ever have been. Being better informed should not necessarily lead to involvement in the day-to-day administration of the schools, but it makes it more difficult for board members to draw the line. In some instances, the question is no longer, "Should board members be involved?" The issue really is: "How can this be done without creating unnecessary conflict?"

> ***"Understandably, superintendents have a sense of turf and professional prerogatives. They often have ideas about how boards and board members should behave. If they are not candid about these ideas, crises can result."***
> ***—Board member, New Jersey***

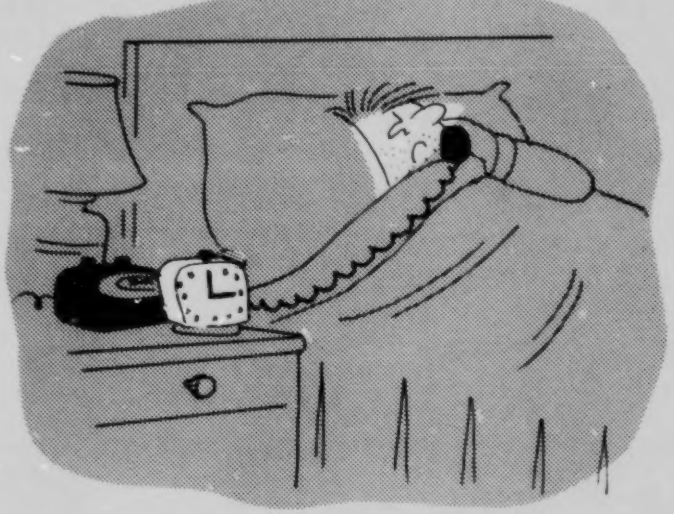
Get the policy book out

To start the role clarification process, a board can adopt or revise policies which specify what the board can expect from the superintendent and what the superintendent can expect of the board.

The superintendent brings a great deal of professional training and experience to the job. Board members bring an understanding of the public's view of the educational process, as well as their own personal knowledge and experience. The backgrounds and abilities of all partners must be combined and mutually respected to produce a working operation.

A board might expect the superintendent to:

- ○ Serve as its chief executive officer and professional advisor on all school matters.
- ○ Remain loyal to the board and faithfully implement its decisions and policies, even if he has opposed their adoption.



"Yes, Mrs. Perkins, I'll check with the superintendent in the morning. I'm sure we will find Jennifer's mittens and scarf somewhere."

- ○ Keep the board fully and accurately informed about school programs.
- ○ Interpret the needs of the school system and make professional recommendations on all problems and issues considered by the board.
- ○ Devote a large share of his time to the improvement of instruction, and be alert to advances and improvements in educational programs.
- ○ Lead in the development and operation of an adequate program of school-community relations, and participate in community activities.
- ○ Use great care in nominating candidates for appointment to the school staff, and promote a strong staff development program.
- ○ Recommend equipment, books, and supplies to the board for purchase that are appropriate to the purposes and needs of the school system.
- ○ Present for its consideration an annual budget that is designed to serve the needs of the school system.
- ○ Establish and manage the financial operations of the school district to ensure adherence to the budget and the wise use of school funds.

A superintendent might expect the board to:

- ○ Assist the superintendent with counsel and advice; giving him the benefit of its judgment, business experience, and familiarity with the local school system and the community.

- Consult with the superintendent on all matters concerning the school system which the board is considering or about which it proposes to take action.
- Delegate to the superintendent responsibility for all executive functions, *and* give the superintendent authority commensurate with those responsibilities.
- Make all employees of the school system responsible to the superintendent, refrain from any direct dealings with them, and receive all reports from them through the superintendent.
- Refer applications, complaints, and other communication concerning administrative matters (oral or written) to the superintendent.
- Provide adequate safeguards for the superintendent and other personnel so that they may perform their proper functions on a professional basis. Support the superintendent's efforts to protect his staff and the schools from individuals and organizations seeking to exploit the schools for selfish reasons.
- Support the superintendent loyally and actively in all decisions and actions which conform to proper professional standards and the announced policy of the board; and accept full responsibility for administrative acts authorized by, or resulting from, the policies and decisions of the board.
- Hold the superintendent strictly responsible for the administration of the schools; require him to keep the board fully informed at all times, through both written and oral reports; review and appraise the results of his work; and inform him when any methods or procedures do not meet with the approval of the board.

"Wilson, about this business of reviewing a list of proposed items, AND AMENDING AT WILL. . . ."

Getting down to specifics

Policies should not only outline the responsibilities of the board and the superintendent, but those of the administrative staff, principals, teachers, and others. Careful thought should be given to the rights and responsibilities of *all* partners.

When defining roles in writing, a board can be as specific or as general as it sees fit. Specific policies allow less room for misunderstanding, but even specific policies should leave room for administrative flexibility.

The board should permit the superintendent to take prudent risks. Further, if he makes a mistake, the board should allow him an opportunity to recover and take corrective action without excessive board interference, criticism, or supervision.

To reach an even better understanding about the working relationship between the school board and the superintendent, some districts develop a list of situations drawn from actual circumstances that require decisions in such areas as personnel, finance, curriculum, community relations, and internal school operations. The list divides the authority the board and the superintendent have to make these decisions into four distinct levels:

- LEVEL ONE: The *superintendent has complete authority* to decide and act within the limits of law, board policy, propriety, and common sense.
- LEVEL TWO: The superintendent has complete authority to act, but *must inform the board* about each decision or action.
- LEVEL THREE: The superintendent must obtain *prior approval from the school board* before taking action.
- LEVEL FOUR: The school board makes the final decision, but *may permit or require a recommendation* from the superintendent.

The process begins with the superintendent and each board member submitting a list of situations. All of the lists are then compiled into a master list. In one variation of the process, the board and superintendent follow these steps to reach a final "decision on decisions":

- Each board member and the superintendent reviews the list of proposed items and may add items to the list.
- Next, each board member and the superintendent go through the list independently. Each indicates his opinion on the appropriate level of authority for each potential situation.
- The individual results are compiled and a composite is made showing the various levels suggested for each situation.
- Finally, the board members and the superintendent seclude themselves from interruptions (usually at a retreat, if there are no "Sunshine" problems) to discuss the composite, attempt to reach consensus when possible, and indicate where compromise might be needed.

This kind of board-superintendent analysis will often reveal the philosophic differences among board members and between the board and the superintendent regarding methods of school system operation. The final outcome may be consensus on some items. In other situations, the board will have to decide who should have what degree of authority for various aspects of operating the schools.

> ***"In our school system, the board generally prefers to delegate the majority of decisions to the superintendent, with the proviso that he keep the board informed. This is an attitude common among large, complex systems. School boards in small systems ordinarily prefer to retain more direct decision-making authority."***
>
> ***—Board member, California***

SAMPLE POLICY: BOARD-SUPERINTENDENT RELATIONSHIP

Most boards seeking a better understanding as to the roles and relationships between the board and the superintendent adopt a policy such as this one developed by the National School Boards Association as part of its Educational Policies Service:

A school board and its chief executive officer form a leadership team.

In order to better define the roles of the members of this team, the Board has determined the following division of authority and responsibility for school system governance and management:

1. Staff Personnel

The Board: Determines the general policies of personnel management, including those relating to employment, promotion, dismissal, illness, leaves of absence, in-service training, and retirement; formulates policies relating to substitute teachers and other substitute employees; and adopts salary schedules and pay scales for all Board employees.

The Superintendent: Recommends personnel policies for Board adoption; executes all personnel policies determined by the Board; proposes adequate salary schedules for different classes of employees; assigns, directs, and supervises the work of all employees; assigns substitute teachers and other substitute employees as needed; and administers in-service training programs.

2. Pupil Personnel

The Board: Determines policies regarding age of admission to school, attendance, truancy, suspension, and expulsion; provides for the annual school census; formulates general policies relating to matters of pupil health, safety, bus transportation, textbooks, and other school materials; authorizes adequate guidance and counseling services; approves the establishment of special classes or other facilities for the physically and mentally handicapped; and, under certain conditions, authorizes the attendance of children at schools outside the school district and the payment of their tuition from school funds.

The Superintendent: Recommends policies affecting children; administers all schools and classes established by Board action; directs the instruction, guidance, and discipline of all pupils; directs the classification, promotion, and graduation of pupils; develops and directs an adequate system of pupil records; develops and administers Board-approved programs for meeting the special needs of atypical children; conducts research programs to determine achievements and needs of pupils; and reports to the Board relative to the effectiveness of pupil personnel policies.

3. Educational Program

The Board: Determines broad policies regarding the general scope of the curriculum and provisions for such programs as kindergarten and community education; adopts textbooks based on recommendations made by the superintendent; provides instructional materials and equipment for school use; awards diplomas of graduation; discusses and evaluates reports relative to the instructional program presented by the superintendent; and recommends areas requiring additional evaluation for study by the administration.

The Superintendent: Recommends policies relating to the scope and content of the curriculum; develops and administers programs of special education, kindergartens, school library services, and adult education; organizes and schedules classes for the various types of training and assigns space for them; assigns qualified instructors for the various instructional areas; decides the general methods of instruction to be used; directs and supervises the instructional activities, and controls all school-sponsored extra-curricular activities and programs; develops and implements in-service training programs for the improvement of instruction, testing programs for evaluation of the effectiveness of instruction, and curriculum improvement programs for the continuous revision of courses of studies to meet changing conditions; develops and implements procedures for the evaluation and selection of textbooks, audio-visual aids, instructional materials, and equipment for school uses; studies the adequacy of the educational program and the need for additions or amendments to it; and directs the work of any curriculum consultants the system may employ.

4. Physical Plant

The Board: Determines general policies relative to sites, buildings, other physical facilities and equipment; provides an adequate physical plant; plans for present and future school building needs; decides what construction should be undertaken; selects and acquires school sites; employs school architects; approves educational requirements and building plans, and awards contracts for construction of new buildings and additions to existing buildings; authorizes all major building alteration or renovation projects; determines maintenance policies; provides for the operation and care of the physical plant; adopts policies relative to the use of school property by outside agencies; and recovers for damages to school district property.

The Superintendent: Recommends policies relating to sites, buildings, other physical facilities, and equipment; analyzes enrollment trends and school plant needs, and subsequently makes reports and specific recommendations to the Board; develops educational specifications for school buildings; works with the architect in planning school buildings; supervises the construction of new buildings; directs and manages the operation and maintenance of all buildings; assigns plant operation personnel to all buildings and maintenance workers to specific projects; reports on the condition of the physical plant; and controls the normal use of school property and equipment.

5. Finances

The Board: Determines the general policies relating to financial and other business matters; authorizes the preparation of the annual school budget and approves and adopts it in its final form; determines tax levies, within legal limitations, for school support after estimating probable income from other sources; adopts standards and passes upon the procedures of financial accounting; adopts policy on purchasing supplies and equipment; provides for efficient purchasing and storage of goods; reviews an annual audit of the school district accounts and business procedures; determines the means of financing capital outlays; and proposes bond issues to the public for vote.

The Superintendent: Recommends policies relating to financial and business operations; analyzes and interprets long-range financial needs and proposals; prepares, presents, and interprets to the Board an annual budget proposal; administers the budget and keeps, insofar as possible, expenditures within individual budget appropriation limits; directs and supervises the system of financial accounting and the related activities of the business department personnel; directs and supervises the program for the purchasing of supplies and equipment; makes regular periodic reports about the financial conditions of the school district to the Board; submits periodic audits of the school district accounts and business procedures to the Board; studies means of financing capital outlays and advises the Board on needs for bond issues.

6. Public Relations

The Board: Determines broad policies relating to the continuous program of informing and educating the adult community about the needs, work, and accomplishments of the schools; represents community attitudes and values in educational planning and policy development; works for proper and adequate state legislation and financial support for schools; and represents the schools in various community functions.

The Superintendent: Recommends policies relating to public relations; organizes and directs a program for keeping the community adequately informed of school developments, accomplishments, and problems; interprets the program and activities of the schools before civic groups; works with parents' groups and other organizations interested in the welfare and progress of the schools; makes an annual report on the school program and policies to the Board and the community; issues other supplementary reports and utilizes available services of the press, radio, and television in the execution of a program of information and interpretation.

DRAWING THE LINE

This chart is an example of a survey and discussion tool which can be developed by a board and superintendent to decide how authority and responsibility will be divided. Your board can develop its own chart, based on actual circumstances in your school district, by following the process described in this chapter.

Degrees of Authority

A Superintendent has complete authority to decide and act within limits of law, board policy, propriety, and common sense.

B Superintendent has complete authority to act, but must inform the board about decisions or action.

C Superintendent must obtain prior approval from the board before taking action.

D School board makes the final decision, but may permit or require a recommendation from the superintendent.

______ 1. Establish a citizen advisory committee to recommend goals for the district.

______ 2. Retain a consultant to assist principals in setting up a remedial reading program.

______ 3. Add a new course in social studies at one high school.

______ 4. Discontinue interscholastic baseball in all district schools.

______ 5. Allow each school to select special courses and subjects not taught at all schools in the district.

______ 6. Determine rules for student dress.

______ 7. Set attendance, achievement, and subject requirements for promotion from high school.

______ 8. Establish a new position entitled, "Director of Research & Development."

______ 9. Terminate a principal.

______ 10. Reprimand a principal for allowing unwarranted corporal punishment of a student and place a notation to that effect in his personnel file.

______ 11. Temporarily suspend a principal from his position for a cause until an investigation can be made.

______ 12. Notify a tenured teacher that, because of continued policy violations, his services are no longer needed.

______ 13. Change attendance boundaries.

______ 14. Permit the John Birch Society to present a one-hour program on the importance of truth and freedom to a student assembly.

______ 15. Lease four portable classrooms for temporary use until completion of a new school that is seven months behind construction schedule.

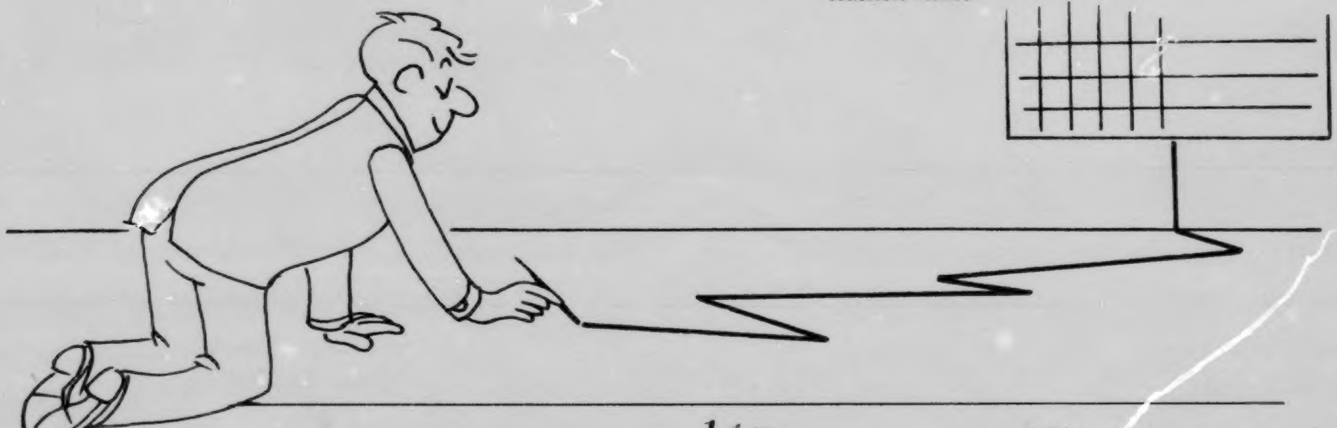
______ 16. Authorize extensive landscaping additions to an existing school.

______ 17. Decide not to seek restitution from a student apprehended breaking windows at a school.

______ 18. Select the architect to design a new wing for a school.

______ 19. Authorize a school principal to exceed his total school's budget, with funds to come from reserves.

______ 20. On a day that two-thirds of the teachers are absent and on strike, decide to close a school and send students and all other teachers home.



Communicating with the superintendent

Working with the superintendent to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the board and the superintendent is an *essential* ingredient of a good relationship. To maintain a healthy relationship between the board and the superintendent, there must be open, direct, and two-way communication.

How does this happen? What methods will be used to communicate? How much about what issues do you and the other board members want to know? *When* do you want to know? How will you ask for the information you need?

The answers to these questions must be aggressively pursued by the entire board and the superintendent, and recorded in policy. Together, both parties must decide how the superintendent will communicate with the board, and what procedures board members will use when communicating with the superintendent. Special consideration should be given to how the board president will interact with the superintendent on behalf of the board.

Tools for communicating

Basically there are three ways to communicate: through written or audio messages, over the telephone, and by personal contact.

"Wilson, do you think these audio messages of yours are getting through to the superintendent?"

Written or audio messages. To keep board members informed on operational aspects of the schools, a superintendent can send them regular memos or bulletins. Memos which outline the major events and activities of the week keep everyone up-to-date. Periodic bulletins can call the board's attention to major events for information or for future action. Special reports or bulletins can provide board members with the details and circumstances about specific subjects, such as a fire at a school. The superintendent might also make available:

- Magazine articles and newspaper clippings relevant to your district.
- School board association publications and reports.
- Copies of reports to the administrative staff.
- Certain reports to state agencies.
- Reports developed at the request of outside organizations such as the League of Women Voters or the local Chamber of Commerce.
- School newspapers, newsletters, and department bulletins.

When timely, such information can be included in the board agenda. This promotes two-way communication between the board and the superintendent, and makes it convenient to have board discussion regarding a particular issue or incident.

To ensure systematic, two-way communication, some districts use cassette tapes. One superintendent prepares a cassette tape every week. Sometimes he talks for 5 minutes and sometimes for 45; sometimes on an educational program or just on how things went in school that week. Board members can turn the cassette over on the other side and record questions, and he can respond at the next board meeting. The superintendent can also respond by writing (or taping) a personal response to the board member who has the question or concern or by telephoning the board member.

Telephone. The telephone can be used well or abused. When emergencies occur, the telephone is the best tool for instant communication. Because of the nature of their roles, the board president and the superintendent will have numerous telephone conversations. But most board veterans and superintendents caution against excessive use of telephone calls to the superintendent. If, for example, every time a member of

"Your superintendent can help you understand the educational process. He or she can serve as a link between yourself and the public. The feedback the administration gets from daily contact with students, staff, and parents can reach the board only if the superintendent cares to bring it." —Board member, Washington

the board had a question, he called the superintendent for an answer, the superintendent would have little time to do anything but talk on the phone. It is also important to note that the telephone has its limitations. You cannot *see* the other person to note non-verbal expressions, which account for almost half of the understanding achieved in face-to-face communication.

Personal contact. Conversations that occur between individual board members and the superintendent can be helpful, but many boards adopt a policy that outlines the circumstances and methods for such communication in order to reduce any suspicion of favoritism on the part of the superintendent, undue influence, or pressure. When board and district concerns are at issue, the superintendent should not say anything to an individual board member that cannot be said to the board as a whole.

Communication between the superintendent and the board president. Although they won't be personally involved in the communication that occurs between the board president and the superintendent, all board members should understand its nature. These two leaders will need to communicate frequently and discuss many matters, including:

- The items to be placed on the agenda.
- The order or sequence of agenda items.
- What board action is needed for each item.
- What role the superintendent will play at board meetings, and at what point he will be recognized.
- The kinds of reports the superintendent will give to the board.
- How the superintendent intends to use staff members or outside consultants during the meeting.
- How to handle emergency situations that might arise.
- How to deal with special interest groups.
- Dealings with the media.

What do you want to know?

As one of your district's policy makers, you have a responsibility and a right to be informed about school matters. Your superintendent may or may not know every detail about every department, employee, issue, neighborhood, problem, and school; but he should know what is going on in major areas of the district and its programs. He usually knows about problems or crises before they become public knowledge.

"As superintendent, Clarence has been having some trouble defining the educational process to the school board."

Whether you and other members of your board want to know about the student who got suspended (1) within minutes of that suspension, (2) at the next board meeting, or (3) not at all, should be a decision that's agreed upon with the superintendent.

On requesting information

There should be agreement as to how board members will request information from the superintendent. Your superintendent should provide you the information you personally ask for when it is available. If it is not easily available, he should explain what efforts it will require to obtain it. A general rule of thumb and policy to follow for requesting information from the administration: If the information that is needed will require considerable time to prepare, the request should come from the board itself, rather than an individual member. If this rule is not followed, too much administrative and secretarial time may be devoted to research activities for individuals. Board policy should set clear priorities for the administration to follow in responding to requests for information.

"When there is a discrepancy between what the superintendent thinks the board needs to know and what the board members think they need to know, you can bet there is a problem."
—Board member, Mississippi

"I think there's a point at which you're spoon-fed if you listen only to the superintendent. But in deference to him, there are times when you should clear things through the superintendent so there's some sort of chain of action."
—Board member, South Dakota

When you request information, it would be worthwhile to consider the following:

- ○ What are you looking for?
- ○ What are you going to do with the information you obtain? Why do you want it? How will you use it?

A common complaint against superintendents is that they "withhold" or appear to withhold information. Most superintendents, however, seem to recognize that school board members want and need information to be effective. Your relationship with your superintendent is likely to suffer if he does not provide you and your board with the information you need to do your job well. But first, you have to request it.

A discussion about individual information needs is important because each board member's needs may be different. For instance, there may be members of your board who want considerable information and have the time and energy to study it. There may be others who are suffering from an overdose of data.

If you are new to the board, your information needs may be different from your predecessor's. To keep the superintendent from guessing about the amount of information you need and expect, you'll want to discuss this with him. In this way, the entire board can keep track of the amount and kinds of information being requested from and provided by the administration. Board colleague responses to your information requests may also help you estimate what kinds of information you can request from the administration as an individual, and what information you should request through the board.

When reviewing information needs with the superintendent, it may be found that you or other members of the board are getting too much or too little information. As a guideline for judging what information is necessary, you might ask:

- ○ What information is needed for policy making?
- ○ What is needed to evaluate policies and their implementation?
- ○ What is needed to evaluate school district operations?

A yearly evaluation of the flow of information will also prove helpful. For this, your board will need an annual listing of the reports and background documents that have been prepared by the administration for the entire board and for individual board members.

Going to the staff for information

You may be able to arrange to get information from staff members other than the superintendent. However, experienced board members warn that bypassing the superintendent may have some pitfalls, such as:

- ○ The superintendent may not be made aware of these contacts or of the nature of them.
- ○ You may be going to a subordinate for information that you should be getting from (or through) the superintendent.
- ○ You may request information from one staff member that already has been prepared by another.
- ○ The administrative subordinate may knowingly or unknowingly undermine the superintendent by stating opinions or taking positions on issues that conflict with those of the superintendent.
- ○ Some subordinates could give you a partial or biased view that could confuse you if not put in a total perspective by your superintendent.

Talking to principals, teachers, other staff, and students can alert you to situations which may need correcting and to policies that may need updating. The thing to remember when dealing with subordinates or students is to ask questions, listen, and to avoid making commitments or drawing conclusions before you have had a chance to validate the information with the superintendent.

The matter of trust

Whether your district adopts a policy that allows board members to go directly to staff for information will depend a lot on how much trust there is between the superintendent and the board. If board members do communicate directly with staff, the superintendent must have full confidence that each will do so within proper limits and will not attempt to undermine his authority.

An atmosphere of trust must be present in this and all board matters. Just as communication is not an event, but a process, so is trust. Trust is part of effective communication and, like successful communication, it must be worked at to be accomplished. Trust, confidence, open communication, and respect are the building blocks for a good working relationship with the superintendent.

"If you've tried on your own to have good communication and made an effort to get a trusting relationship, and you still aren't getting along, you can seek outside counseling or mediation."
—Board member, Wisconsin

Your relationship with the superintendent

"Board members and superintendents should know each other as persons. They shouldn't let their different roles keep them from being friends."
—Board member, Kentucky

How good is your relationship? Ask yourself these questions about your roles and relationships as a board member. Keep track of the number of Yes and No responses.

Yes No

☐ ☐ 1. Do you think you have a good understanding of your role and authority as a board member?

☐ ☐ 2. Can you differentiate between your responsibility and authority and that of your superintendent?

☐ ☐ 3. If asked to describe how your superintendent spends most of his days, could you accurately do so?

☐ ☐ 4. Can you identify the issue, problem, or project that most concerns your superintendent at this time?

☐ ☐ 5. Do you openly respect and trust your superintendent?

☐ ☐ 6. Do you publicly give the superintendent your support and encouragement?

☐ ☐ 7. Do you privately discuss problems involving the school system with the superintendent and avoid surprising or embarrassing him with statements or questions at board meetings?

☐ ☐ 8. Do you keep all confidences shared by your superintendent?

☐ ☐ 9. Do you communicate your expectations of the superintendent directly to him?

☐ ☐ 10. Do you do your homework before coming to board meetings?

☐ ☐ 11. Do you know the procedure for handling complaints, and do you *use* this procedure?

☐ ☐ 12. Do you avoid bypassing the superintendent by dealing with subordinates on issues?

☐ ☐ 13. Do you refrain from making personal commitments to constituents as an individual board member?

☐ ☐ 14. Do you seriously consider and weigh all recommendations the superintendent makes?

☐ ☐ 15. Can you honestly say you make your decisions based on the information provided, and not on any preconceived ideas?

☐ ☐ 16. Do you ask the superintendent only for the information you really need to make a decision on an issue?

☐ ☐ 17. Do you accept and approve most personnel recommendations made by the superintendent?

☐ ☐ 18. Do you think having good rapport with the superintendent is important?

☐ ☐ 19. Can you be friendly with the superintendent and respect his opinions, even when you disagree with him?

☐ ☐ 20. Do you usually tell the superintendent what's on your mind before you tell it to everyone else?

If you can say Yes to all the questions in this quiz, you may not need all the counsel provided in this section. These questions address the gamut of issues that can make or break a relationship between an individual board member and the chief executive officer for a school district.

"What did I tell you, Slagley, we had that vote in the bag."

"If it looks like one board member is buddying up with the superintendent, the other board members will resent it, and show it."
—Board member, Texas

Getting personal

Though you participate in the relationship your board has with its superintendent, the dynamics of that relationship can be quite different from the relationship you, as an individual, have with the superintendent.

Remember, as an individual board member, you have no legal authority outside of the board room. Your authority exists only as a member of a collective policy-making body. Given this, it has been said that "the opinions and convictions of individual board members have weight only as they contribute to the discussions and considerations shaping the official decisions of the board."

Of course, if school boards and superintendents only followed their legal roles, personal relationships would be of little concern. You and your superintendent could put aside all of your personal likes, dislikes, needs, and desires.

Not being robots, this simply is not possible. So, unlike the relationship the board has with the superintendent, the relationship you will have with the superintendent can't help but be personal. It involves you and another human being, and *that's* personal.

One question remains: "What kind of personal relationship will you have with the superintendent?"

Start with your attitude

You don't have to let the relationship between the superintendent and yourself happen by chance. You can shape and nourish it, assuming the superintendent is willing. To do this, you must first decide just *how* personal and friendly a relationship you want. Board members interviewed about whether board members should be friendly, or even social, with their superintendent, had mixed feelings.

"If you and your board don't trust your administrator, get rid of him."
—Board member, Arizona

Friendliness has its costs. Some board members are adamant about their reasons for *not* having a very personal relationship. One reason is to maintain appearances. One Montana board member explains: "It's nice to be personal friends with the superintendent, but it causes lots of chatter, gossip. When the superintendent and board chairman are buddy-buddy, for instance, it looks like *they* are running everything. They normally have to spend a lot of time together, so they need to avoid looking like a twosome."

Other board members try to maintain their distance from the superintendent for objectivity's sake. "I've purposely put up a barrier. I feel there is a better chance that way of making my decisions based on facts, and not on feelings. I've seen board members and superintendents get so friendly that the superintendent doesn't take them seriously anymore."

"He calls it as it is. If he makes a mistake, he points it out. I know he is as honest as can be. Other people may not like him, but everyone trusts him and knows he's a good administrator."
—Board member, Kentucky

Then, of course, there are board members and superintendents who simply don't like each other. One board member explained her situation: "Everytime I look at him, I cringe. He resents my being on the board and always lets me and everyone else know it. My opinion doesn't matter to him, even though I work hard to understand the issues and contribute to the discussions. It's really hard not to be vindictive when it comes to evaluating his work."

Friendliness also has merits. There are many board members and superintendents who feel good about being friends on both a professional and social level. One superintendent put it this way: "Fortunate superintendents are able to form genuine friendships with individuals of the board. Genuine friendships can survive stress and disagreement."

A high degree of mutual trust and confidence between individuals is critical in several respects. First, it provides a cushion of human relationship at times when a stress situation threatens

***"Know him, talk with him, and be someone who can be trusted."* —Board member, Florida**

disintegration, such as a 3 a.m. marathon mediation session. Second, it diminishes the likelihood of surprises in critical situations and provides opportunities for necessary face saving. Finally, small talk and humor among friends can be a valuable ingredient of compromise.

Talk to the superintendent, trust him

Assessing your attitude about the merits and demerits of being friends with the superintendent is your first step in forming your relationship with him. Talking to the superintendent about what he would like in a relationship is your second. Request a private meeting with the superintendent to discuss mutual expectations.

It is important at this point to recognize the fact that you can be friends with the superintendent without agreeing on everything. As a North Carolina board member said: "We probably never agree 100 percent on any issues. We have different personalities and our management techniques are different, but that doesn't keep us from being friends."

***"Either you trust one another or you don't. Either you have sincere discussions or you both beat around the bush. If you have to learn about problems from the newspaper, rather than from the superintendent, your trust is gone and your communication is failing."* —Board member, Oregon**

Trust and good communication are inseparable

Trust is a key factor in achieving effective communication on an individual basis. Good communication is open communication, and you can't have the latter without mutual trust that allows you to express your feelings.

It's almost a golden rule: You can't be an effective board member without effective communication. It is only through good communication that you will be able to rest assured that board policy is implemented successfully, and that the district is running smoothly.

One board veteran explains it this way: "As a board member, you do not implement policies. You are not supposed to pass out job assignments, supervise staff, or assume any of the tasks that are part of the administrative domain. Since you only meet as a board once or twice a month, the only way you can be sure for yourself and for your constituents that the district is functioning properly is through the communications you have with the superintendent."

Many board members believe that *time* is the key ingredient for strengthening the communication between a board member and a superintendent. As one Kansas school board member said, "How well a board member communicates with the superintendent is directly related to the length of that board member's term. The longer my superintendent and I know one another, the easier it is for us to communicate."

Communication is a two-way process. If you have a concern, you should call the superintendent and say so. The superintendent, in turn, has a right to expect that he can talk to you about his concerns.

Remember also that many superintendents depend on individual board members to keep them informed of community opinions and concerns. By acting as eyes and ears for the superintendent in the community, you will greatly assist him in knowing what is happening in the district and in controlling rumors.

***"Telling a superintendent what you expect in terms of communication can increase the likelihood you'll be continually satisfied—even if he's not the kind of guy you'd go fishing with."* —Board member, Arkansas**

"But, Ellsworth, having a good rapport with the superintendent doesn't mean you're buttering him up!"

KEYS TO A GOOD RELATIONSHIP

When asked, "What can a board member do to develop and maintain a good working relationship with the chief administrator?" veteran board members and superintendents gave this advice:

- Know your job and don't interfere with that of the administration's.
- Devote the time needed to do a good job. Read the background materials the superintendent prepares.
- Don't pretend to be an instant expert on school matters. Don't expect to understand all the problems and functions of a school system in a relatively short period of time.
- Admit what you don't know.
- Don't jump to conclusions; instead hear and weigh all the facts.
- Keep your mind open to change.
- Understand that the superintendent is practicing a career—a highly complex one for which he has prepared with formal training and, in most cases, years of progressive experience. His bread and butter is on the line in the practice of that career and for that reason, if not any other, the superintendent can be expected to have learned at least a bit more about the practice of school administration than the average layman—you, for instance.
- Don't become a complaint department. Communicate with the staff through the superintendent as much as possible. This doesn't mean closing yourself off to teachers, staff, and students, or ceasing to have some personal contact with the real heart of the matter—the schools. When school employees bring their personal problems to you, they are circumventing the superintendent, an action that can split the administrative team and weaken the effectiveness of the superintendent.
- Don't make promises outside board meetings, not only for legal reasons, but also out of respect for the ethics of the situation and regard for the other board members and the superintendent. The entire idea of democracy and an effective board rests on the concept of collective judgment.
- Whenever you wish to discuss an action of the superintendent that you think was improper, do so in private—away from the glare of publicity. If the charges are so severe that they cast doubt on the ability of the superintendent to manage the district effectively, then the entire board should be notified and an executive session held in which the superintendent can respond.
- Don't take all the credit. Listen to what your superintendent has to offer and let him know you're listening.
- If someone complains to you about the superintendent, listen but don't agree. Being supportive of the superintendent shows you have confidence in yourself and in the district management team. If the complaint is serious, ask the person to put it in writing and ask the board as a whole to analyze it Sometimes just requesting that a person put something in writing reduces an issue to a size smaller than that which was first related and interpreted.
- If you have to criticize the superintendent, or any school employee for that matter, do so constructively. Criticize the work rather than the individual.
- Know your superintendent. Be sensitive to his likes, dislikes, what he does, what he expects of you and the rest of the board, what turns him on and off, and what he needs.
- Be realistic about what the board and the superintendent can accomplish. While it is important to envision the best possible program for children, it is necessary to realize that funds, personnel, and logistics are inhibiting factors.
- Don't surprise the superintendent at a board meeting with resolutions, problems, and issues without his prior knowledge. If you "spring" something at a meeting, the superintendent probably will not have the necessary data at hand to allow full and complete discussion of the issue. Incomplete data and discussion lead to unwise decisions.
- Don't evaluate the superintendent's salary by comparing school administration with your occupation.

If you want a good relationship,
don't be frog-minded and jump to conclusions.

7

SELECTING THE SUPERINTENDENT

"When somebody tells me their superintendent has been with them 'longer than dirt has existed,' I tell them they shouldn't be too smug. The odds are they won't escape going through the selection process." —Board member, Idaho

All but about five percent of the nation's school boards select their superintendents. A board's decision on who will head the administrative, teaching, and support staff is perhaps the most important decision members make.

Even if your board already has a good superintendent, it is wise to be prepared and to formulate some sort of definitive plan or procedure for seeking and employing a new superintendent *before* it is required by the pressure of the moment. Statistics show that "superintendencies" are cyclical and, if yours is an "average" board, you may participate in selecting a new superintendent at least once during your tenure as a board member.

A wrong selection is costly

The price of making the wrong selection is high. The superintendent must be matched with the board and community. When good matches are not made, everybody loses. In states where the law permits, boards have been forced to "buy out" the remainder of the superintendent's contract. Poor matchmaking can also lead to resignations and firings. Even if a mismatch is endured until the superintendent's contract expires, the school system will probably suffer from tentative leadership, conflicts, and a sense of "lame duck" management.

Planning is crucial

Except for some local requirements in some states, the superintendent selection process is a board's prerogative. A plan that will enable a board to assess the amount of effort that will be expended in a search, how it will be phased, and how much board involvement will occur in each phase is a vital part of the selection process.

This chapter discusses the various components of a step-by-step procedure for selecting a superintendent. While the first step—deciding what you want—is an essential prerequisite for every board, the steps which your board uses, and the order in which it proceeds, must be tailored to fit your district's needs and situation. Your board may want to eliminate some steps and modify others.

Regardless of the process your board decides to use, it is vital to establish a

"The selection of a new superintendent takes time, planning, energy, and money to do well, but it's worth everything invested, because so many things hinge on that one decision." —Board member, Louisiana

plan of action—from start to finish—before proceeding. It can save time and money; will eliminate a lot of confusion, public second-guessing, and criticism; and should enhance your board's chances of attracting and hiring the right superintendent.

SUGGESTION

For further help on recruiting and selecting a new superintendent, read Selecting a Superintendent *and* Selecting the Administrative Team, *two booklets published cooperatively by the National School Boards Association and the American Association of School Administrators.*

Decide what kind of person you are seeking

"Not knowing what you want is a sure way of not getting what you want."
—Board member, Oregon

Determining what kind of person your board desires in a superintendent—setting your goals and establishing selection criteria—is the first step in the superintendent selection process. You can't be in a position to decide *who* you want, until you know *what* you want.

Your board's final selection will be based on both objective and subjective evaluations. Obviously, you and your board will seek a superintendent of schools who is qualified to run the complex machinery of a school system, who will work well with the staff, and who will be accepted by the community. You also want someone the board can work with.

Setting objective criteria

Primarily, your board's search for qualified candidates will be based on objective criteria, including such items as experience, management style, and communication skills.

In setting criteria, your board may get some help from state certification and eligibility requirements. States, though, usually establish only minimum qualifications, so it is likely your board will add its own standards. For example, if the state requires five years experience in educational management and an advanced degree, your board may wish to specify that each candidate must have spent at least two years in a senior management position, and have earned a doctorate.

In setting criteria, your board should seek input from the community and staff, either by surveying them or by including them in advisory committees which recommend criteria for selection.

In setting objective criteria, it's important to ask:

- ○ What are our overall goals for the district?
- ○ What do the community and staff need? Want?
- ○ What financial and personnel resources do we have?
- ○ What kind of educational program is needed to meet state standards and our own goals for the district?

Once these questions are answered, many school boards find it helpful to develop a specific set of goals they want the new superintendent to accomplish, such as:

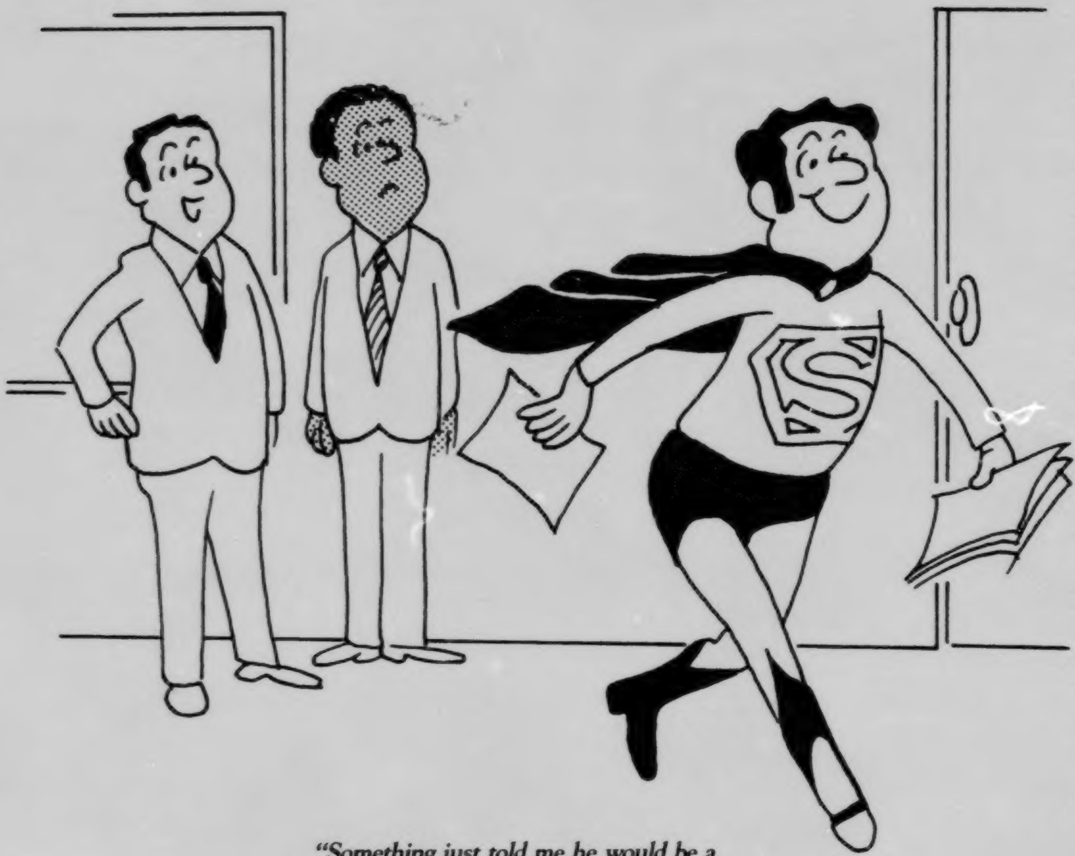
- ○ More stringent staff evaluation and improved in-service training.
- ○ Changes in the curriculum and instructional program.
- ○ Improved board-superintendent relations.
- ○ Improved communication with the community.
- ○ Protection of the *status quo* (or a change in direction).
- ○ Improved student discipline.

If you and your board can spell out clearly what you want a new superintendent to accomplish, you should be able to attract several qualified candidates who meet your objective criteria.

Dealing with subjective factors

When it comes to actually picking a superintendent from the field of candidates, how you and your colleagues *feel* about and react to an individual will weigh heavily on your ultimate decision. Good "chemistry" is important, but remember that subjective criteria should be applied only after all of the objective requirements have been satisfied. After all, what benefits will the school system derive from a superintendent who is liked by members of the board, but who cannot do the job that needs to be done?

Actually, the artistry required in superintendent selection is nothing more than realizing that objective criteria will



"Something just told me he would be a terrific superintendent!"

"One fellow had all the qualifications, but we all reacted to him the same way: We were afraid of him. We thought he'd try to take over the district."
—Board member, North Carolina

provide a list of qualified candidates, but a final choice is likely to be based on individual and collective opinions of how suited a candidate is to the needs of the community. As one consultant concludes, "Facts must be weighed first, but the scale will be tipped by interpretations."

Interpretations and impressions may be formed over something simple or something substantive. For example, one board member says, "The person we hired spoke of people and of faith in a way that impressed me." Another admits, "I could tell by the way one candidate answered questions that he'd really done his homework. He knew more about the district than some of the board members!"

Many impressions are often formed in the subconscious and affect our decisions without our knowing it. Although our subjective interpretations cannot be negated, they can be better managed if brought into the open. In fact, your board might profit by spending some time in the planning stage discussing the subjective qualities each member seeks in a new superintendent.

You and your colleagues are likely to have different tastes, styles, and other preferences. If these divisions are severe enough, you should try to arrive at a compromise *before* you embark upon other aspects of the search. The last thing you want to occur is to have these subjective points boil over into a debate over specific finalists. Decide up front what personality traits and "type" of person is desirable.

The positive reactions and the subjective interpretations you make should reflect the needs and attitudes of the whole community. In the final analysis, veteran board members will tell you that the most any board can do is to establish its objectives and trust its instincts.

Decide how your board will involve the community and staff

I PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE....
BOARD of EDUCATION

In the community of boardsmanship, no single issue is more sensitive than shared involvement among the board, staff, and community. Although most boards acknowledge that citizen and staff participation in all phases of public education is desirable, the sensitivity of the issue revolves around the question of, "How much involvement?"

The importance of selecting the "right" superintendent draws the question of "how much" into sharp focus. Boards are divided on the question of whether citizen and staff participation in the selection process is really desirable, and are even more sharply divided on the question of the structure that assistance should take when community or staff involvement is allowed.

A debate-riddled concept

Here is a quick rundown on the major contentions that make community or staff involvement in the search process a debatable concept:

Con: Potential for problems. One board warns against letting the community get too involved in the selection of your superintendent: "Once a superintendent is chosen, his allegiance should be to the board and not to groups that claim to be responsible for his selection."

"Communities sometimes think they know who they want and push this 'favorite son.' If the board doesn't agree, this can destroy a school district." —Board member, Texas

Other negative comments include:

"There were just too many people to please, and those who didn't participate got jealous."

"We knew all along that if we didn't accept the committee's views, we would be accused of acting in bad faith."

"Citizens have their say in electing their representatives to the board, and the board is responsible for selecting a superintendent that meets the goals of the community."

"If you want community involvement, then you should confine it to helping set the district's goals."

Pro: They are involved anyway. Says a consultant to school boards: "Members of your community, your professional staff, and your student body should be invited to get into the act. In most communities these days, they will demand to be involved whether you like it or not." Others agree:

"You should like it. The process of working up a description of the school leader the community wants invariably brings school problems to light and helps to identify the directions the district should move toward their resolution."

Even though the board makes the final choice, broad community input can be an important ingredient in establishing a smooth selection process.

Want a simple solution?

If you and your colleagues are honest about it, the degree to which you allow community and staff involvement will depend upon what your local constituency demands and what you can live with.

One state school boards association

"While helping your board choose a new educational leader, the people of your community will be reevaluating the educational program in their schools whether they realize it or not." —Board member, Tennessee

executive says the boards in his state are utilizing citizen committees to *interview* candidates. He says the program works well, reflects what the people want, and predicts that "although it may be radical today, it will become the norm tomorrow."

Another state association executive disagrees. He notes that many qualified candidates won't apply under these circumstances. "When news that the superintendent is looking around reaches his home district, it weakens his current position. He becomes a lame duck."

> ***"Your board may be unified in its disdain for a local tax watchdog group, but if that group represents a significant segment of the community, it should be invited to participate."***
> ***—Board member, New Mexico***

What's the difference? The boards in the first state are dealing with "what the people wanted" and, in all likelihood, demanded.

The simple solution then is do what you must do, *but make absolutely certain that you first formulate, adopt, and publicize formal ground rules which include an understanding that all citizen or staff action is advisory, that the responsibility for the resolution of all questions is expressly the board's, and that the board will make the final decision.*

No board should try to abrogate its legal responsibility to pick the superintendent. Do not let teachers, students, and civic leaders be misled into thinking they are *choosing* the superintendent, rather than *advising* the board on criteria and process.

How boards involve their communities

Many school boards schedule a series of meetings with representatives of both the lay public and professional staff to ensure the input into the process is both relevant to and representative of the district's needs. Sources commonly tapped include business and civic groups, parent organizations, advocacy groups, teachers, other staff members, and students.

If you and your colleagues want public involvement in the selection process, you should publicize that fact. Most boards send letters to key leadership groups and the local news media for this purpose, and they are careful to include in the announcement a description of the scope of citizen or staff involvement.

Boards that hire consultants often have them supervise staff and community involvement. Many use the consultant to chair meetings with staff and citizens on the presumption that, as outsiders, consultants can be objective enough to defuse bickering and other negative interplay between the board and various citizen or staff groups.

There are three major areas in which boards involve the district staff and other publics in the selection process:

Goal setting. Often, people want to define what's wrong with the school system before they establish what they want in a new leader. Once the citizens' and staff's concerns have been aired, exchanged, and discussed, your board will have a better feel for the kind of superintendent they would hire. You and your colleagues can then compare community and staff input with your own goals and proceed with developing suitable criteria for selection.

Screening applicants. While many boards find it useful to have their consultants screen applicants, many also appoint members of the community and staff to perform this function for the board. If you decide to have a screening committee for your district, develop (or have your consultant set up) a training session for its members. Be sure the committee members know that the lack of one quality might not automatically eliminate an applicant, and the possession of one desired quality should not necessarily qualify a candidate in all respects. They should be required to read each applicant's file thoroughly, rate the candidates solely according to the desired criteria, and forward to the board the best list of qualified candidates possible.

If you do use staff or citizens to screen applicants, be sure that potential candidates are aware of this process. Also, the screening committee should be used *only* in *initial* screening. The board should decide the final list of candidates. Another tip: Don't release any confidential material, such as letters of recommendation, to staff members or citizen screening committees. Most applicants will want to know that personal references will be kept private.

Interviewing candidates. Many potential candidates will shudder at the prospect of being screened or interviewed by a staff or citizen committee. However, this process is used by many boards.

Some boards and superintendents claim that traditional methods of superintendent selection are not public enough for the board to learn what their constituents want, for the community to learn who they might get, or for the superintendent candidates to learn what they and their families can expect.

Some districts schedule a series of informal social events in which the staff and community can meet potential candidates. The board can then receive private, individual comments from participants. All applicants should be informed that, if they apply, they will be subjected to the process. Says one school board chairman: "As a practical matter, the new superintendent will be working with the staff and community leaders long after this board leaves. We want to get an idea of how a candidate will interact in advance."

Caution: Subjecting candidates to public scrutiny can backfire. Instead of ending up with the best candidate, the best candidate may pull out of the race or never enter. Some veteran superintendents will refuse to participate in a public interview out of dislike for this process or because of fear of jeopardizing their current positions. As one AASA representative said: "We're finding that the minute you expose candidates to the public, especially if it's too early in the selection process, a lot of them will pull out. They're not sure they want to leave their present positions. Consequently, a board might find itself with just those candidates who need a job."

"Hey, Ed, how did your interview go with the citizen's committee?"

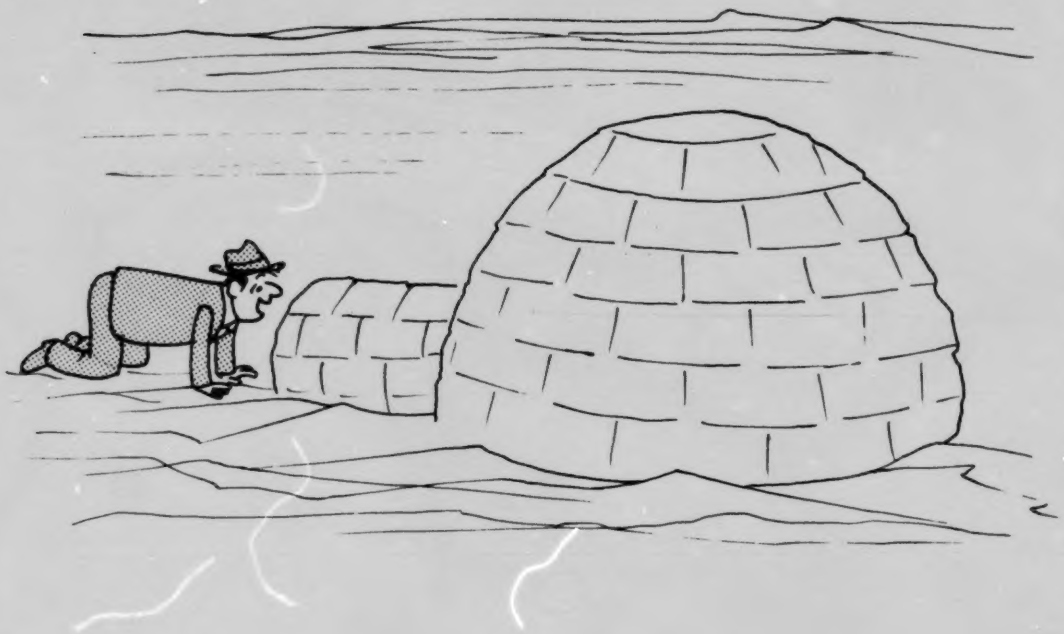
Some rules of thumb

If citizens who care about their schools and support them generously ask to have some voice in picking a new superintendent, the board should find some constructive way to use this community zeal without abrogating its own legal responsibility. A process that involves all sections of the community and staff can work. Just remember the ground rules:

- ○ The board makes the final choice.
- ○ No community or staff group should have veto power over *any* candidate.
- ○ The board should seek comments, not endorsements.
- ○ Comments should be received from individuals.
- ○ Don't allow the staff or the community to usurp the board's role by taking straw polls or pooling comments.

As board members, you are politicians as well as public servants. This means that your decision on the level of staff and community participation is likely to be at least partly governed by the importance your board attaches to community input and involvement. Decide at the outset how much community or staff involvement is necessary, but realize that your final objective is to get a qualified superintendent with whom the *board* can work effectively.

Decide if the position is to be filled internally or externally



"We changed superintendents so we could make other changes. We were tired of hearing our old superintendent, who had been with us 13 years, say, 'I'm going to do it this way, because this is the way I have always done it.'"
—Board member, New Hampshire

"We wanted to hire someone from outside the state, and the reaction was, 'What is the matter? Can't you find any good people in North Dakota?'"
—Board member, North Dakota

Once your board has determined what *kind* of superintendent it is seeking, the next decision involves how the board can best meet its goals: by hiring from within or outside of the district?

There are upsides and downsides in both courses. Hiring from within the district will provide a superintendent who is familiar with the system, who knows the staff and probably gets on well with any number of them, and who will be a walking advertisement for your board's fairness in rewarding good work.

Internal promotion, though, isn't always a bed of roses. Some boards have found that hiring from within has brought them problems of stagnation in the district's programs, complacency in the superintendent's office, and a beehive of internal politics.

Your board could, of course, avoid the choice by simply opening up the process to both internal and external applicants. This would allow the board the pick of many qualified candidates, and improve the odds of getting a top talent for this most important administrative post.

Qualified local candidates should have their "day in the sun." Having at least one or two finalists from within the system can be a good morale booster—if they are honestly in contention.

Don't set up a charade. In either case, it is a mistake to include any candidates who have no real chance to be appointed. If your board has decided to promote an insider, *do it!* Don't hold meaningless interviews and waste valuable time. On the other hand, if all local candidates have been eliminated, don't build false expectations by including a "token" local finalist.

Acknowledging that a nationwide search by a board leaning toward internal promotion might appear to be a charade, one board member says the process may be necessary to establish the internal person's "credibility" for the position.

Another board member disagrees: "If you have a strong candidate in mind, and his selection is a mere formality, then there isn't any real need to go through the process. Some boards go through the motions, just for the ap-

"If you doubt the qualification of in-district staff, solicit their applications, but stress they will be evaluated under the same criteria as other candidates. This lets the employee be recognized, but also allows the board a real choice."
—Board member, Idaho

pearance that they've made an impartial choice."

In any case, all qualified local candidates should be interviewed by the board and given the same consideration that is accorded outsiders.

The key word here is judgment, because that's exactly what your board is facing in this decision: a judgment call.

A rule of thumb

Once your district knows what it wants in a new superintendent, and is just as certain *whom* it wants, proceed with hiring. If, however, you and your colleagues are uncertain—or divided—on the important question of *who*, you should review the qualifications of current staff, decide if any employees can meet your goals for the district, and let the outcome govern whether a broader search is indicated.

The key to making the right decision (finding the candidate who can work with the board to effectively meet its objectives) is through the goals the board, staff, and community have developed. It's not sufficient to say, "We want to maintain the *status quo,* so we'll hire from within." *All* the board's objectives must be weighed in making this decision.

Where to get help

Your board doesn't have to depend solely on itself for this decision. Help is available from any number of sources, including your community, your retiring superintendent, your state and national school boards associations, a nearby college or university, or neighboring school districts that have undergone a similar experience.

Once the decision is made

If your board decides to conduct a nationwide search, it should proceed with completing the remaining steps in the process. Your board also should follow the steps in the formal process if it decides to fill the position through promotion from within the district, but either does not have a particular candidate in mind or intends to look at several candidates.

Only if your board has a successor firmly in mind should it use an abridged selection process. In this case, after interviewing the candidate to be sure he really is the person the district needs, your board can make its offer.

This course is not altogether rare, but is almost totally confined to boards with a very strong interest in maintaining continuity. In many cases, the school board has long since identified a successor, and has seen to it that he was properly groomed for the job (usually with the full knowledge and support of the existing superintendent).

Once started, don't stop

Occasionally, a school board will have already entered into the formal process of a broader search, only to find midstream that a suitable internal candidate exists. In these cases, the board members have virtually made up their minds, but proceed with the formal process—for legal and other reasons—even though it will have little bearing on their choice.

SUGGESTION

If you and your colleagues decide to look beyond your own district for a suitable candidate, you will want to identify as many possible sources of candidates as you can. Some boards speak with their state and national associations or hire a consultant before taking a single step in this process.

While you're at it, don't overlook one of the best of these sources. Look back to the records of the search that brought you your departing superintendent. It is likely that you may have rated some of the unsuccessful candidates highly, and you might find it helpful to check up on where they are and what their experiences have been.

Determine if you need a consultant's help

CONSULTANTS

Political satirist Mark Russell says a consultant is a man who knows *everything* about sex, but doesn't know *any* women. When it comes to a decision on whether to use outside help in planning and conducting a search, a person who knows all about the process, but who is not brokering candidates, might be just what the doctor ordered.

Even if your board can attract plenty of candidates, it may need technical guidance geared toward ensuring that the romance leads successfully to a proposal to the one candidate most likely to enter into a lasting and productive marriage with your board and its family—the staff and the community.

"We used consultants in conducting our search; but we found that we first had to correct some misconceptions and eliminate the consultants' biases to ensure we would get what we wanted from the search."
—Board member, Connecticut

What a consultant can do

Consultants can be used through every step of the selection process, but can be especially helpful to your board in planning an objective process.

Some boards also effectively use consultants to screen applicants. Board members rarely can invest the time it takes to pour over dozens of applications. A consultant can screen for the board or "subcontract" the screening to an advisory committee, which is a common practice.

Consultants can also:

- ○ Verify resumes.
- ○ Do preliminary reference checks.
- ○ Conduct community surveys by telephone or in person.
- ○ Help design application and interview forms, ads, brochures, and other materials needed for a search.

Where to find a consultant

There are many sources of qualified consultants. Your board might not be able to find one in the phone book, but it can ask a neighboring district where it found one. Most state associations of school boards and administrators provide consulting services to local boards seeking new superintendents. NSBA provides a nationwide "Executive Search" service. University and college professors also assist boards in finding new superintendents. Just as candidates will inquire about your vacancy, consultants also might contact you.

"The first time our consultant came back to us, we were ready to fire him. We got the textbook treatment; we wanted specifics and got generalities. So, we spent the time necessary to get across what we wanted."
—Board member, Illinois

More important than where a consultant comes from is what he can do for the board. Consultants vary widely in experience, track records, and appropriateness for the kind of search needed. Their professional fees vary as well. Shop around. Rather than settle for the first consultant the board interviews, talk to several. Tell consultants the kind of superintendent you want. Then, let them tell you what they can do for you.

Special advice: Before deciding on one or more consultants, compare the services, costs, and personal compatibility your board has with each. It's also wise to have legal counsel oversee the contract with the consultant the board ultimately selects.

Just talking can be beneficial

Talking to several consultants has helped many school boards broaden the base of their thinking about their goals, which in turn helped them to narrow the focus on the kind of superintendent they wanted.

Shopping for a consultant can help even if you eventually decide not to hire a consultant. While a prospective consultant is explaining how *he* would assist you in looking for a new superintendent, he'll also be outlining what *you* will need to do if you elect to undertake the search yourself, and he'll be dispensing advice you can put to later use.

Consultant interviews should not be used solely for getting "free" advice, however. Some consultants with well-established reputations may not make the trip to your community without some reasonable assurance that your board is *seriously* considering hiring a consultant.

What dictates your decision?

A decision to use a consultant usually depends on the amount of time and effort a board wishes to expend on a superintendent search. It can also be dependent on other factors:

- Some boards bring in a consultant strictly for a fresh look at the district, realizing that sometimes you can be too close to the trees to see the forest.
- Boards also employ consultants to overcome a problem with expertise. Two examples: One, a board looking for a change in philosophy, but whose members are grounded in tradition and are unsure of which direction to change; another, a board with several new members who would like a little more time to get their feet wet before embarking upon such a critical decision.
- Boards occasionally use consultants for political reasons. Either they desire the credibility a consultant can bring to a search process, or they recently completed a controversial firing of a superintendent and need an intermediary to patch up differences with the school staff or community.

A rule of thumb

Your board's decision on whether to use outside help in a search should be made on the basis of your answers to these three questions:

- Does the board have the time, staff resources, and expertise to conduct the search?
- Is the board unified on its goals and its preference for the type of person it hopes to find?
- Is the board free from circumstances within the community which might influence acceptance of the successful candidate among its constituency?

If the answer to *all* of these questions is Yes, then it is probably safe for the board to run its own show. If the answer to *any* of these questions is No, then the board is probably better off seeking outside consultation to clear the air.

Each board must also ask honestly, "Do we have the funds, or can we find them, to hire a consultant?" If not, the answers to the first three questions are irrelevant, except as they define the magnitude of the search ahead of you.

A word of caution

If your board decides to use a consultant, make certain it doesn't surrender its freedom of choice. Reserve the right to check the consultant's work at any point in the process.

Also, at the end of the process, when the consultant provides the board with a list of finalists, request a formal report on the *entire* process, including the scope of the search, the resumes and other important papers for each finalist, a general description of the backgrounds of all applicants, and a detailed analysis of the qualifications of the candidates recommended.

SUGGESTION

Don't have consultants do the interviewing for the board. Instead, have them assist in preparing questions for the interviews. The board may also wish to have a consultant sit in to monitor the interviews and subsequently offer further advice.

"The use of a consultant was a worthwhile investment in terms of defining our leadership. The consultants worked with the public. As a result, there was a great deal of confidence in our choice."
—Board member, Arizona

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Set a timetable

***"Time is important. If you take too long, the good people bow out and you end up making a poor choice."* —Board member, Oklahoma**

No superintendent selection process should become a soap-opera; deteriorating in weeks or months (or a year) of dallying while time slips away.

Most experts and boards that have gone through an extended search say a board will need at least 90 to 100 days to complete a proper selection process. Some searches take twice that time. Most boards appoint an interim or acting superintendent during this period, a procedure that can provide a board with an additional qualified entry into its field of candidates.

Your board's timetable should include estimates for the amount of time it will take to set goals, decide on whether to use outside help, announce the vacancy, establish deadlines for applications, provide for community involvement, develop selection criteria and advisory committees, schedule interviews, and conduct appropriate follow-up activities, including second interviews, if needed. It also might logically include target dates for announcing the board's decision and the day the new superintendent will begin work.

Here's an example of how one district provided for an orderly flow through its selection process with an appropriate time line, one which ran for almost 200 days:

First 45 days: Assess board goals. Engage consultant. Complete citizen involvement. Establish criteria. Select advisory committee. Draft written materials.

45th Day: Formally announce vacancy. Announce qualifications sought in suitable candidate, as well as details of how selection process will work.

Next 60 days: Accept applications. At next board meeting, announce committee memberships. Release "goals of search" announcement to the media and public in conjunction with board meeting. Make inquiries to placement services, state associations, and other sources to follow up the vacancy announcement.

Next 30 days: Screen applications. The board receives the final report and recommendation of finalists.

Next 30 days: Board interviews finalists, completes peripheral activities, and recalls candidates for second interviews, if needed. At next (or special) board meeting, announce the board's selection (if the board's offer is accepted and a contract is initiated).

Next 30 days: Mail letters informing other candidates of final selection and thanking them for their interest. Also, send letters thanking the media and community for their support and assistance.

Specified date: Superintendent reports to district for assumption of duties on full-time basis.

***"If the date is fast approaching when a superintendent must be on the job, a 'quicky' process can result in which all too often a candidate is hired without adequate study or thought."* —Board member, Minnesota**

"Well, you see, we're looking for a new superintendent."

Prepare printed materials

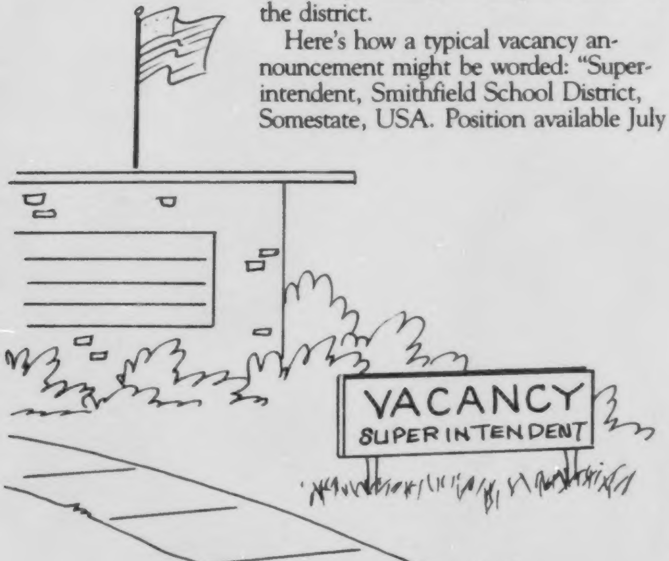
"When I saw 'salary negotiable,' I assumed the board was dirt poor, or was going to chisel me on every penny they could. If they can't be up front about what they can pay, how deceitful will they be on other matters? I didn't bother to apply." —A disgruntled potential candidate

Many school boards utilize printed materials as their primary tools for recruiting qualified candidates for the superintendency. Among the items boards use are vacancy announcements, a job application, a questionnaire, a brochure on the position, and various letters. These materials will be important tools for your board, its consultant, and its advisory committees.

With your criteria now clearly in mind, you and your colleagues should determine the types of printed materials to be used in the search. Here are some typical models for printed materials as developed by school boards across the nation:

Vacancy announcement. This item should be relatively short, simply worded, and direct. It is *not* a promotional piece. The vacancy announcement should include the relevant information about the position, how one applies, the salary offered, and major facts about the district.

Here's how a typical vacancy announcement might be worded: "Superintendent, Smithfield School District, Somestate, USA. Position available July 1, 19—. Grades K-12, enrollment 38,000. 12 elementary schools, 6 junior highs, 2 high schools. Salary: $55,000 - $70,000. Experience in senior administration required. Certification (specify) required. Address inquiry to (officer, address). Formal application mailed on inquiry. Deadline for filing formal application: February 1, 19—."



Application form. This should be designed to meet the goals your board sets for its search. A properly designed form will provide information that can simplify the screening process.

An application form should include standard information such as name and address, educational background, employment and military history, personal and professional references, proof of eligibility for the position (certification, etc.), and placement credentials (i.e., autobiographical material, details on particular areas of academic work, and a statement of educational philosophy).

"A brochure should be scrupulously honest in its description of the school district and the community. It should also be a promotional piece intended to portray the district as a desirable place to live and work." —Superintendent, Florida

Questionnaire. Most boards include "open ended" questions as part of the application form. Others separate the two. Either way, the questions should be designed to provide the board (or screening committee) information relevant to the board's goals and a demonstration of the candidate's ability to reduce big ideas to small paragraphs.

Typical questions that can tell a board a great deal about applicants are:

○ How do you evaluate the effectiveness of a program?

○ Why do you want this superintendency?

○ What is your educational philosophy?

○ How would you organize staff to improve the educational program?

SUGGESTION

Avoid using the phrase "salary negotiable." In the vacancy announcement and all other relevant printed materials, advertise the maximum salary the board will pay for the position. To do otherwise invites applicants the district probably can't afford; may actually discourage others who assume the district can't pay enough; or worse, if the board advertises $55,000 and ultimately pays $70,000, it has probably cheated itself out of many qualified candidates who would have applied if a range of $50,000 - $70,000 had been published in the first place.

- What is the role of the school superintendent?

By looking to your board's goals for the search, you and your colleagues should have little trouble finding out what you want—and need—to know. Just ask.

Brochure on the position. This piece, to be mailed to potential candidates, is a "tell all" on the position and your school system. It elaborates on the simple language of the board's vacancy announcement, and should contain:

- A full description of the community and school system.
- A complete job description for the superintendency.
- The professional qualifications your board requires.
- An assessment of the time demands the position will place on the successful candidate.
- The salary range and all benefits, including termination benefits.
- A description of the procedure for applying.

If you are serious about an extensive search for the best person available, a good, widely circulated brochure may attract someone who otherwise would not have applied if the announcement were only a few lines in a professional journal.

Letters. Your board will need a number of letters throughout the course of the process. Among the "stock items" your board might develop are recruitment letters to "headhunters," educational organizations, state and national associations, and other personnel locators. Also needed are letters to:

- Invite and confirm citizen involvement in any committees the board decides to use.
- Confirm receipt of applications.
- Invite finalists to initial or follow-up interviews.
- Announce the board's selection.
- Thank those who participated in the process.

If your board does not already have a "background" file for these various letters, you can tap several sources for printed examples: consultants, your state and national school boards associations, the American Association of School Administrators, or other districts. Publications such as *Selecting a Superintendent* and *Selecting the Administrative Team* (both offered jointly by AASA and NSBA) are also helpful.

SUGGESTION

If your board would like to see a superintendent from a neighboring (or other) district apply for your position—but realizes he will not apply without prodding—send him a personal letter of invitation to apply, and include a copy of the brochure and related items.

As one board member notes, "You can't always wait for the person you really want to come to you. You have to go out and get him."

Advertise the position and establish the screening process

There are several steps necessary to find out what kind of "market" exists for "shopping" for suitable candidates. First, the board should advertise the position to draw from the broadest possible spectrum of applicants. Next, the board should decide how much time and energy it will devote to screening the candidates and how much screening will be done by its consultants or its screening committee.

Advertise the position

Your board should circulate its notice of vacancy to as many agencies as appropriate for the kind of search it is conducting, including personnel agencies, state or national associations, educational journals, in-house publications, colleges and universities, and bulletin boards. Be certain that the announcement and all other printed materials contain the cut-off date for applications.

Establish the screening process

The screening process can be completed by the board, by its consultants, or by a screening committee. This decision is a function of how much time, effort, and direct knowledge of the candidates your board desires.

The screening process itself has several steps. Depending on the total number of applicants, the board or its screening committee will need to sift through the applications to identify the best three to seven applicants. The credentials of each applicant should be scrutinized and compared with the board's established criteria. If a screening committee is used, there should be no "splitting up" of files: Each committee member should read *every* application.

The next step is to conduct in-depth investigations of the final applicants, including background and reference checks. You can't assume that information presented in an application is 100 percent accurate.

If the board has others do the initial screening, the recommendations of finalists should be presented in both a written and oral report to the board, which also explains the screening process and the reasons why the consultant or committee recommended each finalist.

After the finalists have been selected, the board should notify those candidates not selected by letter.

"We're supposed to sift through these applications and come up with seven or eight candidates."

SUGGESTION

Many former employers are reluctant to say negative things about their former employees and may be reluctant to answer questions beyond just giving a general reference to your board. Selecting the Administrative Team (AASA/NSBA) *includes an excellent process for conducting a reference check that you and your board may find useful reading before conducting background checks.*

Interview the screened finalists

You and your colleagues now have a list of finalists, and you can now get down to the nitty gritty. Use the interview process to pin down how each candidate fits the *objective* criteria established by the board, and meets your *subjective* judgments. Based on your interviews, it is likely you will further narrow your field—ideally to a final top candidate but, more realistically, probably to two or three finalists.

Most veteran board members who have been through this stage of the process are skilled in the science of interviewing. They recognize that general questions such as, "Why is public education important?" have probably been dispensed with in materials used in the initial screening process. These veterans often preface their questions with the phrase: "How would you handle the situation in one of our schools if...?" However, if you really want to know why your potential superintendent thinks public education is important, ask the question.

What do boards usually ask?

Anything and everything. Organizations such as your state school boards association can provide you with lists of suitable questions. NSBA, AASA, and other groups also have such lists available.

On these lists, you will find questions dealing with philosophy, community relationships, educational programs, professional growth, relations with staff and students, professional contributions, and others. Even if you find these sample questions useful, you and your colleagues should spend some time deciding specifically what you want to know.

The reason? You will find out a great deal about a candidate by asking, "Do you think busing works as a tool for achieving desegregation of public schools?" But you will learn more if you alter the question to, "Do you think *this district* should implement busing to

"It's better to suffer the looks of indignation from other board members or the candidate for asking an obvious question than being confused about what the answer might have been."
—Board member, Wisconsin

solve its desegregation problems?" If you are interested in a candidate's ideas on the role of the schools in fighting drug abuse, ask, "What can *we* do to respond to the growing number of our students who are using drugs?"

Note: Tailoring the questions your board will ask to specifics of your district presumes that your candiate has done some homework. This is desirable, of course, but not all your candidates might have had the same opportunity to study the local situation. For example, you don't want to give an unfair advantage to a neighboring superintendent who has lunched with your outgoing administrator when other candidates may have come from other parts of the state or from across the country. So provide your candidates with a background briefing on how the community views the subject of the question and give the candidate an opportunity to question you, in turn.

Remember that you are making subjective judgments about the finalists, and you will probably select the candidate who makes the best impression on the board. To be fair to your potential new superintendent, you should ask—as directly as you can—about the things you want to know. If your board can achieve that in the interview session, the odds are very good you'll achieve it on the day your new superintendent reports for work—and the many days beyond that.

SUGGESTION

It should be obvious, but don't forget to include travel expenses for candidates you invite to interviews in your "selection process" budget. This item may have to be somewhat flexible, since you don't know from the outset who the interviewees will be. A local travel agency may be able to assist you by making arrangements for airline accommodations at the best available rates. Don't expect a candidate to fly halfway across the country and spend several days at a local motel at his own expense.

HOW TO FIND OUT ABOUT CANDIDATES *BEFORE* YOU INTERVIEW THEM

Your board doesn't have to wait until it interviews a candidate to find out important things about him.

Here's a checklist of some desirable qualities boards often seek in superintendents and some possible sources of information that will fall within the other steps in the selection process:

Demonstrated interest in education

Look first at the resume. In addition to on-the-job activity, check out organizational memberships and offices held. If special qualifications are included, check to see if he's published any related articles. Make a discreet inquiry through his state professional administrators association.

Regard for employee relationships

Ask for a statement of philosophy when advertising the position. See if the response includes a reference to employee relations. Find out from sources in his current school community if that district has had labor problems and why. Ask his former district (discreetly, if necessary) about its in-service programs and the special benefits it provides teachers and professional staff who continue their education. Secure a copy of his district's personnel policies.

Compatibility with the board

Having the candidate provide a statement of philosophy is a good start. Look at the resume for hobbies and activities. Find out about his home community and compare it to your own.

Public relations skills

The resume should include particular training or skills development. Contact his local Chamber of Commerce or service clubs and inquire about his level of activity. The resume should list organizational activities.

Management expertise

Again, the resume is a chief source. You might also ask for a list of accomplishments his district achieved under his direction. What improvements in school management have been made? What goals were set and met? How do these relate to what your board wants to achieve?

These are only a few examples of how you can use materials collected in various stages of your selection process to develop a profile on your candidates. Another technique is to *study the resume.* As one board member put it, "You would be surprised what you can tell about a candidate just by looking at the resume." Is it concise or rambling? Do some items appear "puffed up?" Is the list of memberships current? Does he belong to so many organizations that real participation is questionable? Has he chosen a readable format? How well a potential superintendent does in preparing his "calling card" should tell you a lot about how he will prepare materials and recommendations for the board if it decides to hire him.

Obviously, there are philosophical and other considerations your board won't have the opportunity to assess except in an interview, but effective use of information gathering at early steps in the process can help better prepare you and your colleagues for the interview sessions.

Complete peripheral activities

Once your board has completed its interview process, it should verify its conclusions about candidates by completing some peripheral activities. The board may have a need for further background checks to go beyond the usual checking of references. Possibilities include:

Indirect reference checks. Many boards will contact persons the candidate did not list, such as the members of his current board, a deputy superintendent, or a known community leader. This must be done only with the assurance that the candidate *knows* you are establishing the contacts, and it's absolutely taboo if you guaranteed confidentiality in accepting the application.

Meeting the candidate's family. Many boards interview a candidate's spouse formally, while others may make a spot analysis by scheduling a dinner or other event including the spouse. If the board has invited the candidate's family, the board picks up the expenses for the candidate *and* the spouse's visit. In some cases, especially if the candidate's family includes teenagers, you may want to consider inviting the whole family. Remember, how well your potential superintendent's family likes your community may have a direct effect on the board's ability to acquire his services and on his ability to perform the job.

Community visitation. Many boards choose to visit the candidate's home community. Some boards, because of sensitivity, will make the trek under the guise of "studying" how the other district operates. However, unless this is done by skilled masters, it's not likely to mask what is really going on. A better plan is one in which the candidate is aware (and supportive) of the board's visit. Then, private meetings can be scheduled to expose the board representatives to other administrators, board members, union leaders, staff, students, civic leaders, or even newspaper reporters and editors.

Health checks. You should require the last group of finalists to submit the results of a *recent* physical examination.

Note: While you are checking out your potential future superintendent, he will be conducting a similar investigation. Just like prospective home buyers check closets and attics while the seller looks at credit references, this mutual "examination" is a good idea. Both parties in an important employment situation should be as open as possible during the preliminary interviews and checks. Questions should be asked and answered at this stage, not after a contract has been offered or signed.

"No, Mr. Higgins, a target date hasn't been set by the school board on when the new superintendent will begin work."

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Recall candidates you wish to interview again and make a final selection

INTERVIEWS

"The second interview is the time to get all the facts onto the table, to get remaining questions answered, and lingering doubts resolved."
—Board member, Ohio

Many boards are simply unable to narrow their finalists list to a single candidate without a second interview. There are numerous reasons:

- First impressions did not hold up during reference checks or community visitation.
- More than one outstanding candidate was interviewed, and some indecision or difference of opinion among board members exists as to which is best.
- The board wants to be absolutely certain it has the right person before offering a contract.
- The board is uncertain about the terms a candidate will seek in a contract.
- Some "second choice" candidates carry the political backing of influential parties within the community. The board may want to do a little work in stating the case for an alternative choice.

The value of a second interview is that it gives your board both the opportunity to resolve any lingering questions or issues, and one more opportunity to size up a candidate (or candidates). A second interview will also give your prime candidate a chance to reverse the process—that is, to have the board answer remaining questions he may have about the schools, the community, or individual members.

What to ask

Since the second interview is largely an exercise in clarification of previously discussed or late-arising points, many board members consider it one of the most crucial steps in the selection process. Here are some examples of the kinds of information to expect from a second interview:

- The candidate's attitudes about the schools and the board.
- Clarification of inconsistencies that may have become apparent since the first interview.
- Reaction of the candidate to specific areas in which the board members have doubts.
- A feel for how the candidate's family perceives the community. (Often, the decision to relocate is a family affair.)
- An idea of the candidate's salary and benefits expectations, or assurance that the advertised considerations are suitable.
- An expression of the candidate's sincere interest in the position. Many boards have made a decision and tendered a final offer, only to receive a rejection.

Wrapping up

If the board has reached the point of tendering an offer to a candidate during a second interview, it should say so—keeping in mind, of course, that hiring must be the result of action taken in an open public meeting of the board.

If your board simply hasn't found what it is looking for, it needs to reappraise its position to be certain it has valid reasons for passing over all of the candidates. The same is true if the top candidates have withdrawn from further consideration. In each case, the search will have to be extended.

You and your colleagues should offer the candidate an appropriate period of time to consider his decision. In the majority of cases, discussions of this type are undertaken for the board by its president or another designated spokesman. If your board is still not ready to

"If none of the final candidates appeals to the majority of the board, then none should be hired. Further screening on an objective basis will eventually lead to a subjectively acceptable choice." —Board member, Colorado

commit itself, you should tell the candidate that you are close to a final decision and will contact him within a specified number of days.

SUGGESTION

Once your board has narrowed the field down to two or three finalists, do not announce any "favorite" or "first choice." Never put the board in the position of having to hire its known second or third choice. Make sure that all of the finalists are ready to accept an offer if they are selected.

Presuming, however, that your board is in the more favorable position of having two or three acceptable, willing candidates, it is time to decide. Most boards spend many hours arriving at this final decision, and the proper place for this deliberation is a closed executive session, duly called, posted, and conducted with full public awareness. In the closed session, you and your colleagues objectively and carefully can assess pluses and minuses of each finalist. Set aside an appropriate amount of time for a no-holds-barred session of airing each member's subjective likes and dislikes for each finalist.

Once your board has decided on the *who*, it must also determine the *what*: What will the board offer in terms of salary, fringe benefits, termination benefits, and other specific items in the contract? If you have made overtures to a candidate, it is very likely that you have made arrangements to have him available in person or for a telephone conference. Now is the time to tender the board's offer, contingent on the acceptance of a contract, which must be agreed to by both the board and the candidate. The written offer can include a memorandum agreement which details the board's offer and can form the basis for the final contract.

Most boards have legal counsel draw up the memorandum offer and contract language. The candidate may have his own legal counsel review the language and assist in drafting any additions or modifications.

Items in the contract

The contract should cover all state requirements and accurately set forth all conditions of employment, including:

- Salary, fringe benefits, and any special considerations.
- Duties to be performed by the superintendent.
- Provisions for evaluation, salary advancement, and contract renewal.
- Termination procedures and benefits.
- All special arrangements agreed to by the parties.
- The effective term of the contract.

SUGGESTION

For further help in framing the superintendent's contract, read The Superintendent's Contract, *a booklet published jointly by the National School Boards Association and the American Association of School Administrators.*

After the executive session

Your board's first order of business, upon convening an open session following its executive meeting, is to relate the outcome of the closed session to the public. If your discussions have led to consensus—but you don't have your candidate's acceptance—you should not disclose the candidate's name, and should suspend further action for the time being. Adjourn or recess the meeting until a specified time. If you reached no consensus, the same holds true.

If you achieved consensus and have the candidate's acceptance, report that the discussions have been completed and invite an appropriate motion. Your formal vote must be taken in public. The motion and vote to hire and approve the contract, in effect, becomes the first announcement of your selection.

If your new superintendent is present, introduce him. As soon as your board has affirmed its choice, make a simultaneous announcement in your own and the superintendent's community. No later than the follow-

SUGGESTION

It should be obvious that your new superintendent will want a voice in the timing of your announcement. If he desires time to inform his own board, work out a mutually agreeable date for the final action and announcement to occur. If you want him present when the announcement is made, then arrive at a mutually acceptable date, recess your executive session until that time, and keep the lid on.

ing day, your announcement should also be sent to all agencies involved in the search and to the unsuccessful finalists. With the announcement, include the "thank-you" documents prepared earlier in the process. Return all appropriate materials to the search agencies.

One final note of advice: Your board should consult its attorney on every step involved in conducting the executive session, drafting the contract, gaining acceptance of the contract, and in the open session where the vote is taken and the formal announcement is made. Had William Shakespeare lived in the complicated era of boards of education, he would not have written, "The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers." He would have amended that famous language to, "First of all, we should *call* the attorney."

SUGGESTION

One of the easiest ways to keep the media positively involved in your search is to keep them fully informed on an equal basis. Your board spokesman should be responsible for compiling a list of names, media organizations, and telephone numbers of all the reporters expressing interest. If personal calls are made each step of the way, your board won't find itself being accused of playing favorites.

INVOLVING THE PRESS

The moment your board is faced with selecting a new superintendent, it will be in the midst of a media event. Local news outlets, particularly community-oriented newspapers, will want to know what is going on, and you and your colleagues should take great pains to keep your selection process as open as feasible.

The media will be involved, whether you invite them to be or not. So if your board wants to avoid seeing its search portrayed as some sort of "secret compact," get the media involved.

Here's a list of suggestions for involving the press on a positive basis that may actually enhance your board's efforts:

- Before the search begins, appoint a designated spokesman for the board. Have the spokesman host a briefing for the press outlining the reasons for the vacancy, the kind of process that will be used (including use of consultants and the projected timetable), and which steps of the process will be conducted publicly and privately.
- Invite the press to publicize the mechanics of the board's efforts to involve the community and staff. Provide details about how citizen and staff committees will be involved in establishing the board's goals, criteria, and screening process. After your board selects the members of a committee, tell the media who they are.
- Give the media a copy of the vacancy announcement and other relevant printed search materials.
- During screening, brief the press on what kind of candidates are applying. You might also find it helpful to invite the press to do a feature story on the actual work of the committee.
- A *touchy subject:* Once you have arrived at a list of finalists, the press will want to know who they are. However, most boards must keep the candidates' identities secret, because many top candidates will withdraw if their names are made public. If this is true for your board, have the board's spokesman brief the press on the need for anonymity. *Caution:* Do not "rate" the finalists, or otherwise indicate how the board is leaning.
- Once the board completes its initial interviews, background checks, and second interviews, tell the press how soon the board expects to make a selection.
- When the board has reached agreement with its final choice, invite the media to the board meeting at which public action will occur. While you are getting acceptance of your offer, keep a tight lid on the identity of the finalist. Many boards have been sorely embarrassed by media accounts that they were offering the job to a candidate, only to have the candidate decline. That relegates the alternative choice to "second best" and will leave the press and community with the lingering impression that the district did not get the "best" person for the job.
- After announcing the board's selection, thank the media for its assistance. Inform the press when your new superintendent will be available to schedule interviews.

8

EVALUATING THE SUPERINTENDENT

"The board of education is legally responsible to the state and politically responsible to the community for the evaluation of a superintendent." —Board member, Ohio

For many school boards, the evaluation of a superintendent's performance is a very touchy subject. Some boards perceive evaluation as an invitation to spoiling their relationship with their chief executive with negative or critical review, so they choose to ignore evaluation. When interviewed about the frequency with which they conduct formal superintendent evaluations, a majority of board members responded with some rationale for bypassing the process.

"If I have to wait until formal evaluation to say that I feel we have a problem, then we really do have a problem," said one board member. "Evaluation should be an ongoing process," added another. "Every time I go in to see the superintendent, I feel I'm evaluating him and he's evaluating me," was a popular theme.

These board members have fallen out of step with the changing climate of boardsmanship many of their contemporaries say was ushered in with "The Age of Accountability."

Informal evaluation isn't enough

With increasing frequency, school boards are discovering that relying solely on *ad hoc* evaluations of the superintendent is inadequate. In many states, the law requires that school boards provide procedures for the formal evaluation of the school superintendent and that they use them. For other boards, pressure from the community—especially from "issue activists"—has made formal evaluation the only politically expedient choice.

Adding up the positives

Veteran board members who conduct regular (usually annual) evaluations of their superintendents have found that the sum of adding up all of the positives is *mutual gain* for themselves and their chief executives.

Says one such veteran: "Evaluation allows both sides an outlet—a regular forum for airing issues, problems, needs, concerns, frustrations, or anxieties."

What are some of the mutually beneficial things a formal evaluation can bring your board and its superintendent? It can:

○ Strengthen your working relationship and enable both the board and superintendent to know what each is thinking about the other. It can also help clear the air when you have a festering issue or personality related problems.

"Perhaps it's the amount of time involved that stops our board. They just don't seem to want to put themselves through an evaluation process." —Board member, North Carolina

"Something as important as evaluation shouldn't be done on an ad hoc basis."
—Board member, Alabama

- Provide a basis for assessing the weaknesses and strengths of both the superintendent and the board.
- Document that the board has communicated its desires to the superintendent.
- Provide a basis for commending, rewarding, and reinforcing good work.
- Provide an objective process for making decisions.
- Show the board whether the superintendent is satisfied with his job.
- Provide dialogue and feedback on progress achieved between annual evaluations.
- Give the board an opportunity to reaffirm its role as the superintendent's employer.

Periodic, formal review may not solve all of a board's conflicts with its superintendent, but many board members say it helps keep conflicts in perspective. It also provides a regular, and anticipated, outlet for resolving those conflicts.

Evaluation is a team process. It provides more than just an appraisal of your board's relationship with its superintendent and a fix on how well he is doing his job. It provides each member a basis for assessing how well you work among yourselves.

SUGGESTION

Before you and your colleagues pass final judgment on the effectiveness of your superintendent, take a close look at yourselves. Does the way the board operates help or hinder how the superintendent manages the district and accomplishes board goals? Superintendent evaluation should coincide with board self-evaluation. As your board evaluates the superintendent, have the superintendent evaluate the board.

"A superintendent needs feedback that says he is or isn't doing a good job."
—Superintendent, Kansas

The methodology of superintendent evaluation

In a process as simple as gearing up for the development of an evaluation tool, you are likely to run into a set of easy questions with difficult answers. Your board must ask itself:

- What are we legally required to do?
- What is our moral responsibility to the community to account for the performance of the superintendent?
- What purpose will the evaluation serve?
- How can we avoid this becoming a negative process?
- What role will each member and the superintendent have in developing and carrying through the evaluation process?
- What resources do we have for developing a valid evaluation tool?
- How will we use the results of the evaluation? For performance appraisal? As a guidance tool? For goal assessment? To indicate needed changes?

The answers to these questions are important because they will have a bearing on which *methodology* for evaluation your board selects to meet its objectives and needs.

Methodology—with some options

Choosing a methodology for evaluating the superintendent will involve your board in a study of the options available for evaluation and the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Selecting the method of evaluation, while important, is only the tip of the iceberg, however. The most important aspect of evaluation is the delineation of what precisely is to be appraised.

Knowing *what* to evaluate is the key to deciding *how*. The first direction your board should turn in developing an evaluation process should be inward. Your board should first decide:

- What do we expect the superintendent to accomplish?
- Have our goals, policies, direction, and budget allocations made this possible?
- Does our superintendent's job description cover our expectations?
- What has the superintendent been doing that's right?
- In what areas does the superintendent need to improve?

Once your board has a clear fix on where it is going with its process, it can decide which process is suitable. There are four processes commonly used by school boards to evaluate their superintendents: Checklist/rating systems, written essays, objectives analysis, and performance appraisal. Here's a brief summary of how each works and what your board can expect for each to—and not to—accomplish:

Checklist/rating systems. By far the most commonly applied evaluation method among school boards, the checklist/rating tool has two basic components. The checklist calls for a series of judgments on specific areas of the superintendent's—or the district's performance. *Example:* Does the superintendent keep the board fully informed on all aspects of the school system?

Accompanying the checklist is either a Yes-No answer column or a rating scale that usually provides numerical weighting (EXCELLENT - 5, GOOD -4, FAIR - 3, NEEDS IMPROVEMENT - 2, POOR - 1) to quantify how well the superintendent is performing individual functions.

The principal advantages of this process are speed, the opportunity for a wide variety of questions or judgments, identification of areas needing improvement, simplicity, the impersonality of the process, and flexibility.

The major weaknesses of the process are its reliance on totally subjective ratings, ambiguity in the meaning of "Good" or "Excellent" and other terms, and the imbalance in the weight or importance of various questions.

"Superintendent evaluation should be viewed as a growth process for both the superintendent and the board."
—Board member, New York

Samples of checklist/rating documents are available from NSBA, your state school boards association, and other school districts.

Written essays. Although not as widely used as checklist/rating systems, written essays do assist many boards in evaluating their superintendents. "Essay Evaluation" narratives rely on each board member writing a detailed statement about the superintendent's performance, focusing on strengths and weaknesses. *Example:* "In the area of communication with the board, I find you to be generally open and candid. However, there is a tendency for you to be hard-headed when you disagree. And although I feel well-briefed on some issues, I sometimes have a sense that you're holding back one or two key details. I feel that your giving the board the good *and* the bad news would strengthen our relationship and provide the board with a more complete basis for action."

As you develop your narrative statements, keep the tone positive. A little flattery goes a long way. Tell your superintendent what he's doing correctly. Use the "catch more flies with honey than vinegar" approach to point out negatives. Even if your board eventually uses its evaluation as a basis for firing the superintendent, it should not approach the process as part of an adverse action. Suggest ways his weaknesses can be overcome and his relationship with the board improved. If these suggestions are not heeded, then consider or proceed with other measures.

"If evaluation is to be useful, it isn't enough to say what's wrong. You have to tell the superintendent how to make things right."
—Board member, Missouri

Once the board has compiled its written narratives, the next step in the essay evaluation is to have the superintendent respond. Some boards require a written response from the superintendent. The process is completed in a meeting at which the board members and superintendent discuss the content of the narratives and try to agree on what is to be done to continue the successes and to correct any weaknesses.

The major strengths of the written essay evaluation are its tendency to compel the board to focus on many dimensions of the district's performance, the opportunity it gives to address matters of personality in a fairly impersonal manner, and its ability to provide a basis for discussion in a relatively short period of time.

The principal weaknesses of the written narrative are unequal weighting of procedural and personal matters, the likelihood that some statements will be ambiguous, and the fact that some board members just aren't comfortable when it comes to writing.

Your board might inquire whether your state or national associations have sample essay questions, but it is likely to find that its own goals, policies, programs, and the superintendent's job description are the best sources for narrative topics.

Objectives analysis. Objectives analysis—or management by objectives (MBO)—is an evaluation process in which the superintendent, with the help of the board, puts into writing the things he plans to accomplish in the year ahead. The board and superintendent decide how much of the work is to be completed in each quarter of the year and set up a reporting schedule.

MUMBO-JUMBO?
MBO

Widely used in industry, MBO is a task-oriented plan with a built-in evaluation process. Says a manager who uses MBO: "When the company first trotted out MBO, I thought it must stand for mumbo-jumbo. After a year, however, I wondered how I lived without it. I was better organized, because the MBO identified what I needed to accomplish and set rough deadlines. Each quarter, I gave the board a report on how much had been achieved on each specific task. It gave me a handle on what I needed to pay more attention to and where I needed to improve. By the end of the year, I knew where I had fallen short, but both the board and I had a 'report card' that confirmed I was a pretty good manager."

As applied to most school districts, objectives analysis involves three major activities. First, the board and superintendent determine the objectives and weight each in terms of how important it is. Then they negotiate a rough schedule of how much progress should be made toward each objective during each reporting period. At the end of a reporting period, an informal assessment is made.

The second phase is the completion of an annual review. Normally, the performance evaluation is objectively scored on the basis of the percentage of each weighted factor that has been accomplished. *Example:* The superintendent was to have spent 50 percent of the year on staff reviews and he was to have spent five percent of the year making speeches. He accomplished all of the speeches, which is worth 5 points (100 percent of 5). He accomplished only half of the staff reviews, which is worth 25 points—50 percent of 50. On these two tasks, then, he has scored 30 of a possible 50 points.

In completing the annual review, the board should do one assessment, and the superintendent should make a self-assessment. Then both should compare notes, and negotiate and settle on a final score. From there, the board and superintendent can discuss what happened—noting the positives and determining how to do better on the negatives.

The third and final step in the process is to develop the following year's MBO. The board and superintendent should assess uncompleted objectives and determine if these should be carried over for completion in the following year. The time to do this is while these matters are fresh and already under discussion. Now objectives can be added, and some priorities might be modified.

The major advantages of objectives analysis are task orientation, a built-in system to alert the board and superintendent any time they are falling behind schedule, ongoing evaluation through regularly scheduled checkpoints, a high degree of personal involvement for both parties, and specific accountability on a task-by-task basis.

The principal disadvantages of MBO are the rigidity of the stated objectives (MBO tasks might be accomplished while other items of business are ignored), the reliance on documentation and record keeping, and the danger that the board's goals will be too vague or philosophical to translate into specific objectives.

***"Performance appraisal asks the board to determine what are the superintendent's job responsibilities and... is the superintendent fulfilling each of them?"* —Board member, Oregon**

Performance appraisal. As it is currently being used by many school districts, performance appraisal is something of a cross between the checklist/rating system and objectives analysis. In essence, the process is used to help the board make a judgment on how board policy is being translated into hard results by the superintendent and his staff. Many board members say they prefer this method because it is a process that focuses on both the person and his ability to get the work done. One executive with a state school boards association explains: "In (rating scale and MBO) evaluations, it's easy to focus on one area of concern. A superintendent might have great communication skills, but not be getting anything done—or vice versa. Performance appraisal will measure exceptional skill in human relations and task achievement."

An advantage in performance appraisal is that it forces the school board to decide what its superintendent's job *really* is. As one board member notes, "Without knowing what the superintendent is supposed to do, it is impossible to evaluate how effectively he or she is doing it."

Here's a step-by-step method which your board can use to apply the performance appraisal technique:

1. Determine what the board expects the superintendent and staff to accomplish.
2. Determine how the school system will use its human and monetary resources.
3. Clarify the roles of the board members and superintendent in accomplishing the board's priorities.
4. Identify problems in the superintendent's past performance and areas that need improvement.
5. Specify priorities for items the board and superintendent have agreed to change, improve, or accomplish.
6. Write objectives for the top priority items, setting out who will do what, and by when they will do it.
7. Establish a timetable for the board and superintendent to review progress toward the objectives.

In order to complete the evaluation process, your board should develop three documents: (1) a statement of what the board wants to accomplish through a planned appraisal of the superintendent, (2) a policy concerning the evaluation of the superintendent, (3) and a formal evaluation procedure.

The major advantage of performance appraisal is its "best of all worlds" approach to systematic evaluation of the superintendent. Its major disadvantage is that it takes considerable time and effort to develop and implement.

***"Two things for your board to remember about an evaluation process: Never cast it in stone, and remember that it was not developed for the purpose of casting stones."* —Board member, Ohio**

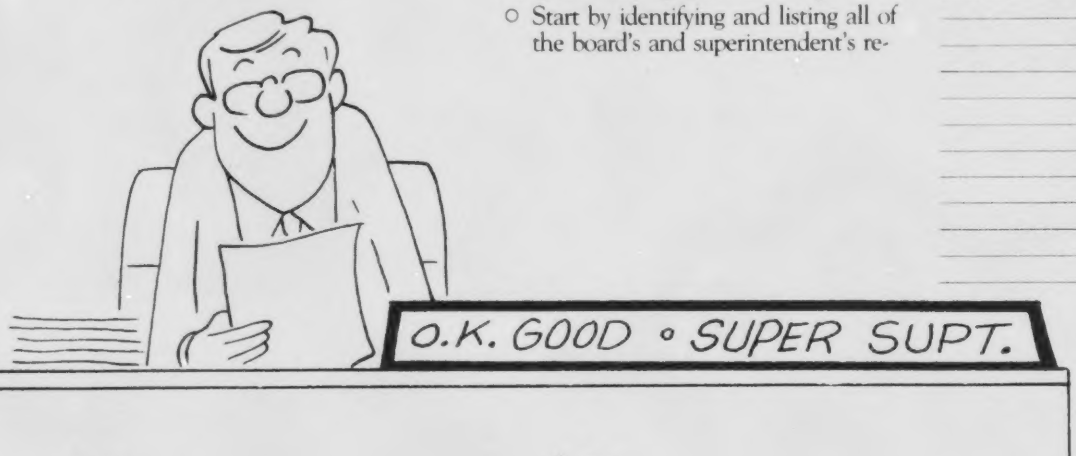
SUGGESTION

For help with selecting and using a method and instrument for evaluating your superintendent, turn to your state and national school boards and administrators associations. Attend the clinics and workshops that they present on superintendent evaluation. You may also find particularly helpful a booklet published jointly by the National School Boards Association and the American Association of School Administrators: Evaluating the Superintendent.

Some mandatory considerations

Regardless of the method of evaluation your board chooses, your process will not be all that it can be if it is done haphazardly. Successful evaluation hinges on taking systematic steps:

○ Start by identifying and listing all of the board's and superintendent's re-


O.K. GOOD • SUPER SUPT.

sponsibilities under the law, board policy, and the superintendent's contract.

- ○ Weigh and balance each area of responsibility to ensure that the overall evaluation is not excessively influenced in any one area.
- ○ Identify the degree of responsibility the superintendent and the board have in each area being evaluated.
- ○ Make evaluation comments and survey instruments specific.
- ○ Provide the superintendent with specific suggestions for improvement, along with positive feedback on areas where he has performed well.
- ○ Follow a formal, annual cycle that provides time for planning, developing criteria, and conducting and completing the evaluation.

PLANNING FOR THE EVALUATION OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

Use this checklist to ensure that your board covers all the bases when evaluating its superintendent.

☐ The standards by which the superintendent's performance is to be judged are understood by both the superintendent and the members of the board.

☐ The board has agreed with the superintendent on a time and place for the evaluation.

☐ The board has specified that no other matters of business will be on the agenda for this meeting.

☐ The board is assured that all of its members will attend.

☐ All members understand that their individual assessments of the superintendent will be compiled into a final composite evaluation which will be discussed between the superintendent and the *whole* board.

☐ The board has established criteria which will evaluate both strengths and weaknesses.

☐ The board and the superintendent have agreed that the evaluation will become a regularly scheduled event, to occur at least once each year.

☐ Both the board and the superintendent will participate. The board will assess the superintendent according to the agreed-upon standards; the superintendent will use the same standards as a basis for self-evaluation.

☐ There is an understanding that when evaluation forms are used, the board still might wish to address other matters (to which the superintendent will also have a fair opportunity to respond).

☐ The board and superintendent have decided on a method of evaluation.

☐ The final evaluation will be in writing, and adequate, objective documentation for all conclusions will be provided.

☐ There is an understanding between the parties that, in some cases, a judgment criteria might be deleted from the process because extenuating circumstances might have precluded the superintendent from performing the function. *Example:* Inservice training was given a high priority, but was interrupted by a teachers' strike.

The evaluation materials

Since any evaluation of a superintendent's performance focuses on what the board wants to accomplish for the district, what the law says the district must do, what the superintendent's roles and responsibilities to the district are, and how well he does the job, there are three materials vital to the process:

1. A *statement of goals and priorities.* Your board should compile such a statement, which takes into account board policies, its statement of educational philosophy, all state and federal laws or regulations applicable to your district, and the desires of the community.
2. *The superintendent's job description.* Your board must have spelled out clearly the roles and responsibilities the chief executive has in carrying out board goals and priorities. The job description should determine how much actual power the superintendent has to complete his work. A fair evaluation must be defined by the limits of this job summary.
3. A *written evaluation procedure.* Your board and its superintendent must arrive at an agreeable structure for evaluation, including timetables, procedural mechanics, and the criteria under which judgment will be made.

The appraisal instrument

A key part of your board's written procedure will be its evaluation instrument. The structure of this instrument will, of course, vary with the method of evaluation your board selects.

Generally, school boards divide their evaluations to identify performance indicators and personal characteristics of the superintendent. The performance characteristics are usually broken down to establish general functions, under which numerous "rating subdivisions" are included.

A typical family of evaluation criteria (with a few examples under each topic) might look like this:

Relationship with the board

- ○ Keeps board informed.
- ○ Offers professional advice.
- ○ Does not play board favorites.
- ○ Refrains from public criticism of board members.
- ○ Participates in resolving differences of opinion.

Community relations

- ○ Accepts input from all groups.
- ○ Works with news media effectively.
- ○ Provides leadership in other areas of the community.

School/staff relations

- ○ Develops sound personnel practices.
- ○ Works for good morale.
- ○ Delegates work properly.
- ○ Is impartial in personnel matters.

Leadership in education

- ○ Organizes procedure for staff evaluation.
- ○ Participates with community, staff, and board in curriculum development.
- ○ Is informed on all matters of education.

Business and finance

- ○ Is informed on physical needs of system (plant, supplies, equipment).
- ○ Monitors budget and informs board on financing needs.
- ○ Assists in identifying, planning, and implementing capital improvements.

Personal qualities

- ○ Is respected in the community, schools, and in education.
- ○ Has good health and maintains it.
- ○ Works well with others.
- ○ Is suitably attired and well-groomed.
- ○ Writes and speaks clearly and effectively.
- ○ Is poised in the face of a crisis.

COMMON PITFALLS IN EVALUATION

Says a board member from Missouri, "If your superintendent gets a glowing rating, but you're left with the feeling that things are still terribly wrong in your district, your evaluation didn't work."

Adds another board member, "It's easier to evaluate the negative and overlook the positive, but that will give your superintendent a skewed impression of how you view his performance."

These are the most common pitfalls in the evaluation process: undertaking evaluation without a clear understanding of what the superintendent is—and should be—doing; evaluating in a vacuum; thinking of evaluation only in terms of correcting deficiencies; and overlooking half the purpose of the evaluation: acknowledging and rewarding good work.

Here are some other things to avoid in evaluating:

- ○ Measuring performance without carefully constructed standards.
- ○ Posturing as psychologists.
- ○ Not providing a forum in which the superintendent can respond to the board's evaluation.
- ○ Not providing time for the superintendent to correct deficiencies before acting on the results of the evaluation.
- ○ Assuming that the longer the evaluation form is, the better it is.

9

CHANGING THE SUPERINTENDENT

When most board members think of "changing" their superintendent, they only think of "firing" the superintendent because of poor performance, a poor evaluation, or other reasons. There are, however, numerous reasons boards change superintendents, including:

- Arrogance—the inability of a "professional" administrator to accept the role of lay board members as his collective boss.
- The inability of the superintendent to make changes sought by the board and community.
- Poor performance and failure to improve.
- Philosophical differences or disputes over educational program priorities.
- A breakdown in communication between the board and the superintendent—failure to keep the board informed, and springing "press surprises" on the board.
- Personality clashes or differences of style between the superintendent and members of the board.
- The death or incapacitation of the superintendent.
- The resignation or retirement of the superintendent.

First step in dealing with change

The time to take the first step in changing your superintendent is long before a change is in sight. For starters, your board should research the legal and other factors influencing a change of superintendent and reduce them to a clearly stated policy. Such policy might include language on:

- Retirement.
- Resignation.
- Compliance with state laws (if any).
- Any local conditions that are related to a change.
- The reasons and circumstances under which the board would change its superintendent.
- Removal and termination proceedings.
- The appointment of an acting, temporary, or interim superintendent.
- The commencement of a search for a "permanent" replacement.

"It's important that a board support its superintendent by encouraging and providing for his ongoing professional development." —Executive staff member, AASA

A different meaning for change

Boards also "change" their superintendents by helping them change in place. Boards which have succeeded in changing the attitudes or practices of the incumbent, rather than replacing him, often find that the effort put into a "changed" superintendent requires less time, expense, and work than to literally change superintendents.

When changing a superintendent in place, a board will need to review and possibly revise its policies on board-superintendent roles and responsibilities, the board-superintendent relationship and communication, board and superintendent evaluation, and professional development for the superintendent.

No easy answers

When President Jimmy Carter talked about the awesome problems of the presidency, he said, "If the answers were easy, the solution would have been found years ago." In many respects, the same is true of changing the chief administrator. Helping a superintendent change in place, if that superintendent doesn't want to change or if the board is not also committed to change, can be a frustrating (and often futile) exercise.

If a "change" is in the future for your district's superintendent, better boardsmanship requires that your board accept the challenge of change as an opportunity for reassessment of its goals and priorities, and plan for a change as carefully as for any other opportunity.

"You're beginning to wonder if you hired a dud. The best advice for the moment: Step back, sit down, and talk." —Board member, Montana

The 'changed' superintendent

"Our superintendent asked for direction on how we wanted him to improve. He wanted the board to evaluate his job performance from our informed position as board members, disregarding public opinion." —Board member, Missouri

When the chief administrator for a school district is unable to perform satisfactorily or does not have a good working relationship with the board, there is a need for change. But too often boards approach these problems by firing the superintendent or seeking his resignation. There is ample evidence that some boards act too quickly to be rid of a superintendent who might have been saved by a board willing to invest the thinking and time necessary to help him improve his performance or attitude.

This "change in place" technique, though often overlooked, can be one of the least costly and most productive of all avenues of change, especially for boards looking at bad evaluation results in the first or second year of a three-year contract with their superintendent.

If your superintendent does not match the "great expectations" you had when his contract was signed, the first step the members of the board should take is to sit down and discuss what qualities attracted them to the superintendent in the first place. Then the board should do some soul-searching. Are you really concerned about the superintendent's performance, or have public pressure, changing circumstances, or a change in board membership altered your expectations and priorities?

The board should undertake a formal evaluation to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the superintendent, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the board. The board should clearly spell out its problems with the superintendent and give him a chance to suggest ways he might improve in areas of deficiency. Is there something he needs from the board that he is not getting?

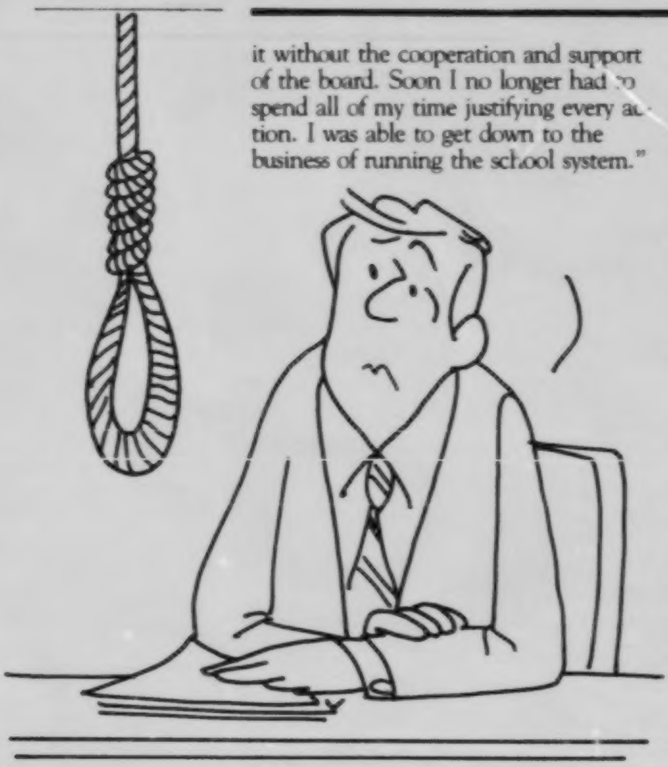
If a board and superintendent agree to make an effort to improve their relationship, both parties should also agree that results must be achieved within a specific time. When the board and superintendent repeat the evaluation process at the end of the agreed-upon period, the results should indicate clearly whether your change program has worked and can continue to achieve results.

Challenging the failure of a superintendent is never pleasant, but it can help set the board on a course for assessing what it wants. If the superintendent cannot or will not improve, the experience should help the board in its judgment about his successor.

One southern district superintendent relates this experience: "The board told me it was dissatisfied, but decided to give me some room and enough rope to either hang myself or tie up a new contract. Fortunately, I was able to make it work, but I couldn't have done

"We weren't about to change our opinion until the public changed its opinion.... Our assessment of his performance apart from public relations was just as low, but we wanted public input to be a prominent part of the superintendent's evaluation." —Board member, Idaho

it without the cooperation and support of the board. Soon I no longer had to spend all of my time justifying every action. I was able to get down to the business of running the school system."



The key to the success in this case was that the superintendent was able to show the board that the miracles they wanted were going to take some time and were also going to require the cooperation and support of the entire board. Says the superintendent, "I didn't expect unanimous agreement, but I did need support."

"A superintendent and a board can't sing two different tunes and then expect the public to hum along."
—Superintendent, Alabama

What your board can expect

If you and your colleagues on the board work to get your superintendent to change and you succeed, the results will justify your joint efforts. If you fail, the most you have sacrificed is some time; but even that sacrifice can have some pluses: Your board will have done everything in its power to help salvage its existing superintendent, and will be better prepared to seek the superintendent's resignation or fire him. Also, the fact that your board did "give the superintendent a chance" will reflect well on the board when it seeks another professional to fill the vacancy.

Seeking a resignation or firing a superintendent

A study by the Michigan Department of Education confirms the hard reality that, sometimes—where they are entrusted with the power to do so—school boards have no choice except to fire their superintendents. The researchers identified a number of conditions that affect a school administrator's job security:

- *Weak rapport with the board* posed the greatest threat. Superintendents who repeatedly refuse to communicate with and seek harmony with their board—even after warnings from the board—are often fired.
- *Lack of staff respect* causes superintendents to be ineffective at translating board policies into action. The result? Weak evaluations leading to replacement.
- *Poor communication* skills make it impossible for administrators to articulate their positions and to be clearly understood. They may be doing a better job than is perceived, but they don't say so, and are shown the door.
- *Annual written evaluations* make a difference. Administrators who receive either informal evaluations, oral evaluations, or no evaluation at all are dismissed more often than those who have regular, written evaluations.
- *Hiring practices* often dictate firing practices. Superintendents hired after inadequate searches by boards which lack adequate counsel and planning are more likely to be fired.
- *Enrollment* makes a difference. Superintendents in districts of 2,501 to 5,000 students, or more than 10,000 students, are the most likely to be fired.
- *Recognition as an educational leader* brings some degree of immunity, because nearly all boards value the ability to educate more highly than any single trait in a superintendent.
- *The ability to negotiate for management* is another plus. Superintendents who are capable of making a good showing in collective bargaining tend to fare well with their boards.

"In my opinion, it's harder to fire a superintendent than to hire one. The firing implies that the board made a mistake in the first place." —Board member, North Carolina

- *The process most boards use to terminate their superintendent is not firing but, rather, refusal to renew an expiring contract.*
- *Termination decisions, once made, are quickly implemented.* Six months notice or less is the norm.
- *Minority enrollment is not a factor.* The study found no significant relationship between the extent of minority enrollment and dismissal rates or pressure from boards to get a superintendent to leave.

What the study shows

In the majority of cases, terminations can be traced to *personal discord* rather than to ineptness in the performance of duties.

Regardless of the symptoms, your board will know the disease: You will find that the board and superintendent are out of step. If this occurs, you and your colleagues have two choices: Either get in step or move to change the superintendent. Most board veterans say try the former. If it doesn't work, then it's time to adopt the philosophy of the Texas board member who advises: "Sometimes you have to look at the relationship with the superintendent like a marriage. You analyze what's gone wrong and resolve to do better. But if the reconciliation ends in more discord, it's time to start thinking about divorce."

"A superintendent should be given due process, just like any other school employee. If a board bases the firing of its superintendent on a poor evaluation, the evaluation process better be damn good." —Executive staff member, AASA

Call your lawyer

If your board is going to file for divorce, bring in legal counsel. The termination process in your district may be affected by state law, relevant court decisions on due process, the provisions of the superintendent's contract, or all three. If your board makes a legal error, its termination of the superintendent can be invalidated.

Among the issues and topics on which wise school boards consult counsel before proceeding are:

- Compliance with open meeting laws.
- The difference between the firing of a probationary administrator and the termination of a nonprobationary administrator's contract.
- Whether the administrator has the right to request a hearing.
- Selection of a hearing officer.
- Notice requirements.
- Procedures for scheduling and conducting a hearing, including presentation of evidence and testimony.
- Provisions for appeal to the board and the courts.
- Adherence to their termination policy.
- Board liability under the superintendent's contract.
- The individual liability of board members.

SUGGESTION

It's not uncommon for a board to convene into executive session and to decide—on the spot—to fire its superintendent. Such decisions are usually made in haste and are often rescinded.

Don't do this! *It violates due process requirements and, if the board later decides it made a wrong decision, it will have ruined its relationship with its chief executive. Even if he stays on the job, he probably will harbor a feeling that the board betrayed him.*

"Firing a superintendent is a traumatic experience for everyone involved—the board, the superintendent, the staff, and the community. If you can appeal to the superintendent's natural instincts for doing the right thing for the school district, it softens the blow." —Board member, Ohio

Some alternatives to firing

Occasionally, a school board will not have to fire its superintendent. If he knows the board is unhappy, perhaps solely on the basis of personality, the superintendent might agree to resign, provided the board allows him time to seek relocation and agrees to give him a positive reference on performance issues.

The expense of buying out a long-term contract can sometimes be avoided by granting a pay raise in the current year in exchange for release from one or more years remaining in the existing contract. Some boards have sought lump-sum contract settlements which, though expensive, save them money over the long run.

"A board has the right to have the superintendent it wants, but if it decides to fire the superintendent, then basic fairness calls it to live up to its contract of employment." —Executive director, NSBA

The field is wide open or, as one board member notes, "You never know until you ask. It could be that the superintendent will be more relieved than you are to be rid of a bad situation." Before it rushes into a lengthy firing procedure, your board should make its dissatisfaction known to the superintendent, determine if the situation is reparable and, if not, ask him if he would resign.

If your board attempts this approach, it may first be rebuffed by an indignant superintendent. Let the superintendent think about it, but keep up the pressure. Check with community leaders, find support, and bring public pressure subtly to bear on the chief executive. In the end, if he resigns, your board may save a costly contract buy-out or a public firing.

Another alternative to firing or to buying out the superintendent's contract is to redefine his duties. A board in Texas did this by negotiating a settlement under which the superintendent stepped aside to become a "senior consultant" to the board on matters of legislation and liaison with state education agencies.

Another board decided to make the most out of the money it had to pay for the remainder of the superintendent's contract by demoting the individual to lesser responsibilities, but at the same salary he was previously making. After about one year in the new position, which was answerable to one of his former deputies subsequently promoted to superintendent, the former chief executive resigned.

Believing itself to be saddled with a superintendent who was capable, but unable to adjust effectively, one large suburban district offered to help that superintendent apply for and receive the top job with a smaller, rural district.

"My district produced dozens of National Merit Scholars, but the board complained about losing football games. They gave me an ultimatum: Fire the coach, or else. 'Or else' turned out to be that we were both fired."
—Former superintendent, Texas

SUGGESTION

Your board might be able to avoid much of the wrangling involved in firing the superintendent by providing for such a contingency while hiring the superintendent. When hiring negotiations are underway, both parties are putting their best foot forward, and the atmosphere is always more positive.

As your board begins to frame its contract, why not provide termination language that includes the circumstances and procedures for firing, and the severence policies of the district? It is easier to negotiate these items with a superintendent who is convinced he's going to do a good job than to bargain with a superintendent in the heat of the moment in which you tell him that he has failed.

ADVICE ON HANDLING THE FIRING OF A SUPERINTENDENT

Firing the superintendent is not only one of the most distasteful aspects of boardsmanship, it is also one of the most complex tasks. Here's some advice passed along by board members, consultants, school lawyers, and others who have run the gamut of a termination:

- *Consult your school attorney.* Legal counsel should be sought from the outset of the termination proceeding so you don't overlook applicable laws and procedures.
- *Tell the superintendent when there's a problem.* Have an open discussion with the superintendent and stress *directly* where there's poor performance.
- *Give the superintendent time to correct the problems.* Most likely, the superintendent came to your district in good faith. He has a professional reputation to protect, as well as a job to do. Problems, of course, aren't often solved overnight.
- *Don't assume that firing is the best answer.* Evaluate the board and the situation, as well as the superintendent. Try to re-write the script before you change the actors.
- *Make sure you are not stepping out of bounds.* Let the superintendent do his job. Make sure that your board is making policy decisions, not constantly second-guessing administrative actions or stifling them before they occur.
- *Get the facts straight; don't act on misconception or bad information.* If the board is fully informed about what the superintendent is trying to accomplish—such as

pointing out the schools' problems and how the teachers union, the city council, and certain board members are contributing to them—the board has a responsibility to listen; not just to the critics, but to the superintendent as well. It is the superintendent's responsibility to offer suggestions for working together to solve those problems.

- *Gather supporting evidence and weigh it for what it really is.* The school board that is capricious, unreasonable, or arbitrary in its approach to firing a superintendent won't work very effectively with the next superintendent...or the one after that either.
- *Know where you are going.* Plan your full course of action, including what to do *after* the resignation or firing occurs.
- *Make the replacement search part of your termination plan.* Contact an expert in superintendent searches *before* you need one to help you prepare for the process.
- *Consult the public and community leaders about your plans.* The biggest mistake some boards make is not letting the public opinion leaders know about school problems.
- *Keep the media informed. They are not the enemy.* Lengthy executive sessions with no official action or explanations may lead to press speculation that turns a problem into a confrontation. The public might agree with the board, but it naturally feels that a public body owes it an explanation—hard information—when an issue as large as this is at stake. Announce that discussions are being held, certain program areas are being discussed, that public response is welcome, and that future developments will be announced prior to any official action being taken. The board should welcome having the media prepare the public for what may lie ahead.
- *Don't jump the gun.* If you try to begin your search for a new superintendent before resolving your existing termination situation, you may have some problems. Try to avoid entering the search process without a settlement of the current situation.

Retirement, resignation, incapacitation, or death of the superintendent

Boards sometimes must change superintendents for reasons beyond their control. The superintendent may retire, voluntarily resign, become incapacitated, or die.

A retiring superintendent usually has achieved the experience and tenure necessary to qualify for pension or other retirement benefits offered by your district or state.

A voluntary resignation most commonly occurs when the superintendent elects to move to another district, change jobs, or decides to take an "early retirement," even though not fully eligible for pension benefits.

POOF!
SUPERINTENDENT

"Often, when a superintendent voluntarily changes jobs, a board is left in shock. As the executive director for NSBA notes, "Resignations are common as superintendents climb their career ladder. Thus, a superintendent might be performing well and everybody is pleased with him or her. Then, *pow!*—a better job offer in a bigger district comes along and *poof!*—the superintendent's gone."

Incapacitation and death are not pleasant considerations, but there is adequate statistical evidence that the stresses of school administration make them of concern to any board.

Board policy needed

Your board's termination policies should address each of these contingencies with a clear plan for replacing the superintendent, both temporarily and permanently. All four factors have a place in your board's policy book, because any loss of a chief executive can be disruptive if your board has not planned to adequately respond.

How boards manage "between" superintendents

"Interim superintendent" and "acting superintendent" are titles given to someone who fulfills the superintendent's responsibilities until the board selects a new superintendent. The exact title used may reflect local language, legal definitions of the terms, or the time of the year the vacancy occurs.

Regardless of what your board calls the position, it is likely to make some temporary provisions for managing the district until it can go through the process of a formal search for a new superintendent. Here are some typical scenarios and the ways boards handle them:

The superintendent informs the board that the approaching year will be his last before retirement. This is the most desirable of circumstances. The board should first go through the paperwork to formalize the retirement, since superintendents have been known to change their minds (which could cause some serious midstream problems). Then a search process can be developed with the incumbent superintendent helping the board to evaluate the candidates.

One note of caution: It is not uncommon for a superintendent to "groom" his own replacement, so many boards planning to conduct a wide search process are careful to apprise their superintendent fully about the ground rules. Usually, this means assuring that the "heir apparent" will be given due consideration with other candidates. In such cases, the superintendent should not be included on the candidate screening committee because of obvious prejudice and the conflict of interest that would exist. Boards in this position often complete their selection process in time for the retiring superintendent to provide consulting or orientation services for the incoming chief executive.

The superintendent informs the board, mid-year, that he will be retiring or resigning at the end of the term. Boards in this situation call upon their superintendent in much the same way as in the first scenario. The major difference is that the lead time is less, and a board might choose to start the subsequent school year with an interim or acting superintendent rather than rushing the selection process.

The superintendent informs the board that he's quitting immediately. Boards usually just accept an abrupt resignation. Some ask the superintendent for reasonable notice and some assurance of assistance after he leaves. However, if a board thinks a sudden resignation will be too disruptive, it can try two approaches: Make an offer in an attempt to convince the superintendent to reconsider, or call attention to the effective contract's termination date and see if he will delay the date of resignation. If the superintendent is resigning to accept a position with another school district or other employment, it may be necessary to negotiate a delay in the reporting date or some type of shared services with his new employer.

Bring in counsel

In any of these "friendly" termination situations, your board should consult its legal counsel. The myriad of laws affecting any transition of this nature are as complex as those affecting a firing or forced resignation. There's a lot to think about: auditing records, getting program updates, signing contract releases, formalizing resignation or retirement papers, and so forth. Whatever interim arrangements your board makes are likely to involve commitments or contracts, and it doesn't hurt to have your school lawyer on hand.

"If it involves money, property, personnel, or accountability—and what in public service doesn't?—then it should involve a knowledgeable attorney."
—Board member, Connecticut

Where boards find interim/acting superintendents

Your board should not have to rush

into making temporary arrangements for managing the district if, in planning for these events, you have done some shopping around for a qualified replacement. Here are some common "sources" where boards find "interim/acting" superintendents:

- *From within the district,* usually a member of the administrative team involved in central office operations.
- *From a state education agency* with a list of certified retired (or otherwise available) superintendents.
- *From the personnel files*—by enticing a former superintendent of the district to come out of retirement briefly.
- *From a neighboring district* willing to "loan" its superintendent or other senior administrator for consulting and other part-time services.
- *From a nearby university* which might have qualified professorial personnel or graduate students who can fill in.
- *From state or national school boards or administrator associations* which can locate qualified temporary superintendents.

SUGGESTION

Remember, the position of acting/interim superintendent requires a substantial commitment of time and effort. If you temporarily elevate a local administrator to the chief executive position, be prepared to include a salary incentive. The approval of a temporary increase in pay and authority *should be a part of your appointed action.*

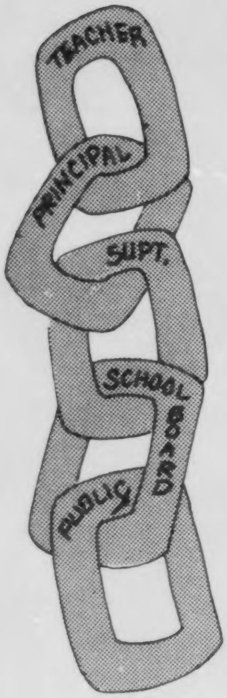
SUGGESTION

If your board finds itself in an interim management situation, it should not overlook its responsibilities to clearly define the role of the interim/acting superintendent to the district's employees and its citizens.

Seek media help in publicizing the interim superintendent's professional qualifications, management role, the extent to which he will assist in seeking a permanent replacement, and if he is to be a candidate for the superintendency. Also, invite some public discussion prior to taking official action to approve the interim superintendent, and be certain the interim executive officer is present to be introduced at the board meeting in which the board takes that action.

10

THE BOARD AND THE DISTRICT STAFF



As a board member, you have both a direct and indirect impact on the quality of education. Your board's activities in developing policies for the design and staffing of the district's programs have a direct impact. The implementation of board policies on grading, teaching methods, and student discipline are examples of indirect impact.

"Stick to the chain of command. People operate more effectively when they know who is responsible for what."
—Board member, North Dakota

"If you don't respect the chain of command, you have a problem to start with, and you're going to create more problems."
Board member, Connecticut

The chain of command

Both kinds of impact are transferred through the vital linkage of the chain of command. Typically, each link in the chain is answerable to another link—the teacher answers to the building principal who answers to the superintendent who answers to the board which answers to the public. (Of course, as a practical matter, all links in the chain answer to the public in their own way.)

The board's role in this chain of command is directorial. Effectiveness in that role depends on your board's understanding of both its relationship with its superintendent and its ability to lead—setting clear policies and goals, planning, and evaluating. Your board, however, must also have some understanding of how the administrative functions it delegates are supposed to work and how policies of the board apply to these functions.

Communicating with employees

Despite the formality of the chain of command, you know that, as a board member, you will come into constant contact with district employees, including teachers, principals, and other staff. There is nothing inherent in the chain of command to prevent this contact. In fact, proper observance of the chain of command should enhance these contacts in two ways:

○ Underscoring the fact that your contact is based on sincere interest in the affairs of the district, and that you have no authority to act individually or in a management capacity.

○ Reinforcing your role as one member of the board that is the employer in that, despite the requirements of going through proper channels, you have a legitimate need to find out what all levels of employees are thinking and doing.

Effective board members learn how to stay within the limitations of the chain of command, while still keeping in touch with non-management employees.

Some common sentiments

Here are some examples of board members' attitudes about staff:

○ "In order to be objective about what goes on between teachers and administrators, I sometimes separate myself from the administrators. I don't always adopt their viewpoints. I try to maintain my objectivity about conflicts that arise between the two."

○ "I'm among those who find many things wrong in school districts," adds a member from Connecticut, "including my own. But I know

"We discovered our idea of what the teachers were thinking was way off. This upset us because we thought we had gone out of our way to explain the budget to them and to talk about our programs." —Board member, Hawaii

teaching is a very, very hard job—one that is emotionally and physically draining. For teachers who stand in that classroom every day trying to do a good job, there has to be more than a paycheck or they won't stay. The job is simply too demanding. If they don't feel their work is recognized, they will either leave the district or become very disgruntled."

What these attitudes indicate

Each of these board member's views indicate an underlying belief that teachers and other non-management employees are important enough to the district to warrant the direct attention of board members. However, in direct dealings with staff, board members must tread softly enough to not erase the fine line that separates legitimate participation from improper, and often illegal, breaches in the chain of command.

Perhaps more than any other facet of boardsmanship, then, the board's relationship with the district staff requires a strict interpretation of the board's role. That role is policy maker; and no matter how well-intentioned your individual contacts with district staff might be, rule number one in dealing with the staff is: *All board action must emanate from policy.*

"Teachers and other employees are important to translating policy into education. If you don't know how well they're doing, how can you judge how well the administration or the board is doing?" —Board member, Vermont

The board's role in hiring district staff

In most states, the board of education is the ultimate employer of all district employees—a fact which carries the appropriate legal baggage of responsibility and accountability. However, it is impractical for most boards to be fully involved in hiring decisions. And, if a board has established clear hiring policy and criteria, it should not need to be involved.

Generally, as the size of a school district increases, the board's "hands on" activities become more remote. Indeed, in the largest districts (if not *most* districts), the board signs off on the approval of teacher and other staff contracts based soley upon a written recommendation, or may delegate final decisions on some staff to the superintendent.

In addition to considerations of district size, factors such as state statutes, superintendent's preference, and community involvement affect how involved boards become in the actual hiring process.

Some examples of hiring techniques

Boards vary in their approaches to hiring of district staff. Here are some examples:

- "According to state statutes, we are ultimately responsible for all employment," says a board member from a large district, "but we fulfill that role by setting hiring *policy*. We delegate the actual responsibility for interviewing and hiring teachers and other staff to the administration. We do approve central office administrators, and we have citizen committees make recommendations on candidates for local school principals. These recommendations, of course, come through the superintendent."
- Another board member from a smaller district notes, "We use a citizen committee to recommend candidates, and we are careful to include ethnic and minority groups in these committees. The committees advise us on the hiring of principals and central office administrators, but the superintendent and the board are not limited to their suggestions."
- A board member from Georgia reports, "Under Georgia law, we can't hire anyone who is not recommended by the superintendent. We don't have to hire his choice, however. We can ask that he recommend another candidate."
- A North Dakota board member says, "We approve teachers after they've already been hired. I feel very uncomfortable with this, but we recognize the impracticality and, really, the undesirability of board involvement in interviewing and selecting teacher candidates."
- A Michigan board member adds, "All you really can do as a board seeking good teachers is to establish qualifications and requirements. You

can take a good, strong look at some of them to get an idea of the quality; but really, that's all you have time for, or even *should* do."

Key questions to ask

In addressing how active a role your board will take in the hiring of district staff, ask yourselves a few basic questions:

- ○ What laws restrict board activity in this area?
- ○ What policy action is indicated?
- ○ How much time can the board commit to actually screening candidates?
- ○ How effective have past board and superintendent hiring choices been?
- ○ What level of public involvement is indicated?
- ○ How important is the position to be filled?

Policy action indicated

Typically, a board policy on staff hiring would include:

- ○ A general statement of goals ("The district will make every effort to attract, hire, and retain highly qualified personnel. . . .").
- ○ An equal employment opportunity clause.
- ○ Language determining the specific authority of the board, superintendent, and other administrators.
- ○ Language concerning selection criteria, special preferences, and so forth.
- ○ Procedural lanaguage ("The superintendent will recommend to the board. . . .").

Board policy should not only address teachers. It should cover the hiring of administrators and classified and other noncertificated support employees, as well.

Compensating staff so nobody loses

Many of the policy decisions your board will make focus on employee compensation. Compensation has a direct relationship to your district's ability to recruit and retain the highest quality teachers and other staff.

How much should you pay?

Obviously, your board's ability to pay will be based upon fixed budgetary concerns. How that pay is structured will also depend on numerous variables. For example, do the base salary figures used in your district account for fringes and other benefits that increase the value of total compensation?

As a practical matter, the salary and benefit plans your board approves for district employees (or offers in a proposed negotiated contract) probably will be dictated by two factors: how much money the district has, and how much of it the board is willing to spend to get what it wants.

Many boards make the latter decision based upon comparability or, as one veteran terms it, "the going market rate for a teacher of x experience in y location in a district of z size." One useful tool for this decision is the Education Research Service, Inc.'s *National Survey of Salaries and Wages in Public Schools*, which was compiled to offer data comparing compensation in school systems of similar enrollment size, expenditure levels, and geographic regions. Most state school boards associations also make this type of information available.

More than money alone

Compensation, however, can take many forms and is supplemented in many ways, so the issue of pay is not merely how much *money* your board plans to put into its compensation budget. Although there is nothing wrong with money, there are other rewards that are prized by teachers, including recognition, invitations to give expert testimony to the board, respect from principals, school-sponsored programs promoting competency, better instructional materials, and even visits from the board and superintendent.

As one Colorado superintendent believes, "Great teachers don't teach for the money, but for the self-satisfaction and the occasional praise from their employers. It's the self-satisfaction that keeps them going." Other forms of compensation, though, can help.

"Have a Mary Smith Day at school and be generous with the praise."
—Superintendent, Colorado

Key questions to ask

When deciding matters of compensation, your board must answer numerous questions, including:

○ What does the budget restrict us to?
○ If we have a union contract, how does that restrict additional compensation?
○ Should we offer merit pay or bonuses to really good teachers?
○ Should we reward staff for earning advanced degrees or training?
○ How do our pay schedules compare to similar-sized districts in this area?
○ What kinds of additional compensation do we offer, such as benefits, paid vacations, awards programs, or perquisites?
○ How do our system's benefits compare with those offered by similar-sized districts within our area?
○ How high is the morale of our teachers and other staff members?

"You want to raise an employee's morale? Raise salaries!"
—Board member, California

Policy action indicated

Your board should have a general policy on staff compensation. This basic policy can be augmented with numerous others. Some examples:

Professional staff contracts and compensation plans. This policy should include general language which will remain unchanged as salaries fluctuate. It might provide for contractual relationships with employees as individuals and with employee groups. It might express the board's management goals the policy is intended to achieve. It also should refer to state law that governs contracts and compensation.

Professional staff salary schedules. These schedules are used to denote the current minimum and maximum salaries for various administrative and teaching positions. They also apply to adult education classes, summer school, and other similar special schedules.

Professional staff merit system. This policy should cover the evaluative and procedural considerations involved in the awarding of special pay for meritorious service. It can stand on its own or be merged with policies on staff evaluation.

Professional staff supplementary pay plans. This type of policy delineates special pay for extra duty, such as coaching, summer work, and so forth.

Professional staff fringe benefits. This policy should delineate procedures and qualifications for special programs, such as reimbursements for tuition costs for job-related education. It should also detail all programs to which the district contributes, including insurance and retirement. Policies for leaves of absence, sick leave, maternity leave, sabbaticals, and funeral leaves should be dealt with as separate policies apart from fringe benefits. The same is true of leaves allowed for jury duty, vacations, and holidays.

Other policies. Your board may also require special policies for compensation of part-time help and support staff, as well as other policies which may be required by some special provision of a negotiated compensation package.

"Teachers are unhappy on their jobs because of stress, poor salaries, time required for duties other than teaching, student disciplinary problems, and harsh treatment of education by the media. School board members ought to help combat this alarming situation. We can start by looking at our own school systems and making every effort to create an environment in which any teacher can function happily and effectively."
—Board president, NSBA

Providing for staff development

"In-service education shouldn't be a one-time shot. We are constantly bringing in consultants to fill gaps in our teachers' education." —Board member, New Mexico

In today's complex environment, many educators are hard-pressed to keep up with the rapid changes taking place in their profession. In-service education can provide staff with the tools necessary to remain proficient, and will show that the board puts a premium on self-fulfillment for employees.

Typically, boards gear most of their in-service education efforts toward professional development; that is, toward the development of certified employees. Subject areas vary from area to area, but generally follow one of two tracks: Either the programs are mandated by state statutes and feature a "curriculum" intended to meet the staff improvement intent of that legislation, or the courses are "college catch-ups" which are intended to bring employees up to date on key developments that have occurred since they were in school.

Some boards (and some laws) require that all professional staff members receive at least a minimum number of days of in-service training each year. Other boards actually provide incentives for employees to pursue professional development. These incentives include: reimbursement for tuition costs to staff members pursuing job-related education; pay for time spent on job-related sabbaticals; cash payments for the hours devoted to the additional training or college credit hours; and, if the additional training eventually translates into an additional degree, increased pay via the employee's achievement of a higher salary step which is based on degree level.

An Ohio superintendent whose district provides such incentives says, "Perhaps it seems that we are paying teachers for in-service training. Nevertheless, we believe that professional growth benefits the district by providing better education and a more educationally current staff. In other words, it's worth the price."

Some key questions

Your board's decision on the nature and extent of in-service training should follow some discussion in which it attempts to answer a number of key questions:

- ○ Is having the staff remain up to date on current trends of value to the district?
- ○ Are you required by law to provide in-service education?
- ○ How much flexibility does the district have in selecting the topics for staff in-service education?
- ○ Have evaluations of administrators and staff shown a consistent weakness which could be corrected by an in-service program?
- ○ How extensive are human and financial resources for staff development? How much should you commit, and can you afford it?
- ○ What are neighboring districts offering to their employees?
- ○ What kind of expertise is required to conduct an in-service training program? Does the district have its own talent, or will it have to import experts? At what cost?
- ○ What types of educational media are open to the district? Classroom lectures? Educational TV channels?
- ○ Besides in-service training, what other forms of staff development and opportunities is the board offering? Should it be offering more?

Policy action indicated

Your board should have a policy to express its position on opportunities to be offered to staff for professional growth and career-related self-development. It could include descriptions of the kinds of developmental programs outside of the district for which the staff would be reimbursed. Many of these, such as sabbaticals, special leaves, seminar expenses, and conferences, might also be covered in other policies on specific subjects.

Providing for the evaluation of staff

"When our evaluation process comes up for review, the board looks at it and pretends to know what it is. To the superintendent, they say, 'Go on with what you're doing."
—Board member, Connecticut

How do effective boards guard against the all-too-common occurrence described by the board member who said, "Teachers close the door of their classrooms, and nobody really knows what's going on inside"?

Prudent boards set out policy guidelines for the evaluation of their employees, just as they do for the evaluation of the superintendent. Boards, however, almost always delegate the actual evaluation to the superintendent or other members of the administrative or supervisory team. Because of the importance of staff evaluation, many districts appoint someone at the central office level to be responsible for it; for example, an assistant superintendent for evaluation and research.

Know your evaluation process

Often, the results of staff evaluations will come before the board while it is considering renewal of staff contracts. Prior to making this final judgment, many boards find it useful to know exactly how a teacher receives the ratings earned in an evaluation.

One board veteran says, "The purpose of evaluation is not to dump teachers, but to assist them in their professional development." Apparently, any number of state legislatures agree. Many have passed statutes requiring periodic, systematic evaluation of all teaching staff.

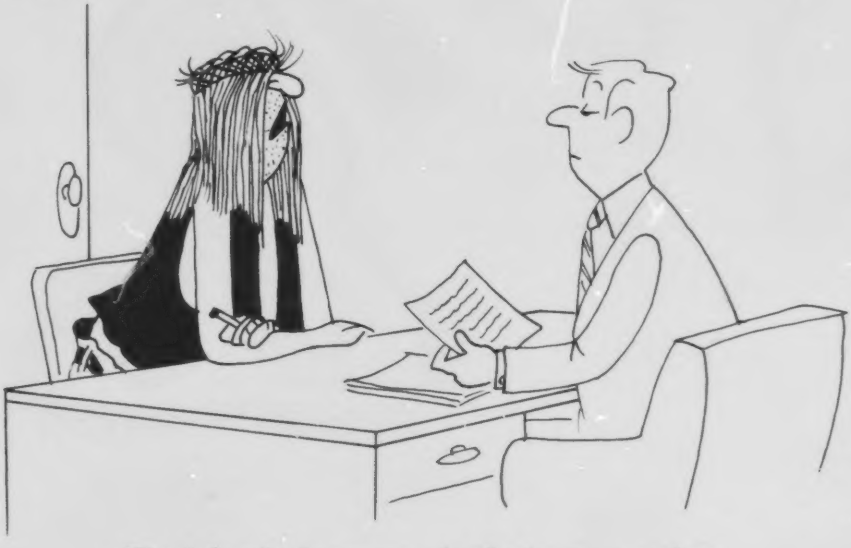
Avoiding a couple of pitfalls

Your board should ensure that the district's evaluation process helps the evaluators overcome two of the major pitfalls in making judgments of staff: lack of objectivity and lack of detailed information.

Evaluators will need a job description or specifications on hand for each person they evaluate, if they are going to provide for a fair evaluation. They also should look at what the staff member has done toward development beyond the normal limits of the job. For example, a typist who takes a course in secretarial science at a junior college should have a way of having that measured in evaluation.

SUGGESTION

If your district has a staff evaluation procedure in place, ask the superintendent to explain its development and use during recent years. Determine the extent of the board member's role in staff evaluation.



"But I thought the purpose of evaluation is not to dump teachers, but to assist them in their professional development."

Some key questions to ask

1. Has the board encouraged staff evaluation as a step in staff development?
2. Has the board provided the opportunity for staff involvement in the development of evaluation materials?
3. Is the board really knowledgeable about the evaluation process?
4. Is the board knowledgeable about the different techniques of evaluation, such as self-evaluation, peer evaluation, supervisory evaluation, and evaluation by students?
5. Do the board's policies clearly spell out the expectations of and objectives for the staff to be evaluated?
6. Why is the board supportive of employee evaluation?
   - Statutory requirements?
   - Staff improvements?
   - To convey expectations to the employee?
   - To document termination or promotion?
   - To grant or deny tenure?
   - To decide on merit pay?
   - To identify areas where in-service training is needed?

Policy action indicated

Your board's policy should identify and separate the criteria for evaluating teachers, support staff, and administrators. Teacher evaluation criteria might be broken into subsets based upon considerations of teacher experience (new teachers, experienced nontenured, tenured) or teacher assignment (elementary schools, secondary schools). This ensures that evaluation accounts for the different requirements for suitable performance in various levels of the schools.

Spell out the board's purposes and goals in the policy providing for evaluation, as well as the specific delegation of evaluation duties to administrative or supervisory staff, and some specific language on the procedures under which the evaluation is to be completed and reported to the board. The policy should also include a time line for the evaluation process.

> ***"Evaluation helps the board realize that there should be room for upward or downward mobility for staff, based on job performance."***
> ***—Board member, Michigan***

Termination and due process

> ***"One problem some boards have is that they don't want to ruin a reputation, so they make up petty reasons. When it gets to court, they lose the case."***
> ***—Board member, North Dakota***

There comes a time in the life of any board when it must deal with the "other side of the coin." One such occurrence is the presumption that your role in the hiring of staff gives your board a role in the firing or reduction of staff.

As noted, one of the purposes of evaluation and staff development programs is, as one board member describes it, the process of "monitoring performance, recording activities in the classroom, and then doing everything the district can to help the staff member improve on performance."

Ultimately, if all of these efforts fail, then board members shift their view of what these processes provide. Says one veteran, for example, "Evaluation also ensures that failures and weaknesses are documented, that the standards for personal performance are realistic, and that administrators evaluate in accordance with those standards."

Veteran board members know, however, that evaluation alone will not keep them out of court when a discharged employee decides to fight a termination. Boards must have clearly written policies that ensure any staff member facing termination is afforded due process. Faced with a particular case, a board should first ask of its administration, "Have we followed due process?"

Call the attorney

It may seem that half of boardsmanship is calling on counsel, but employee termination proceedings demand that the district has access to a lawyer's advice. Most state statutes require districts to go through a formal due process procedure before terminating any tenured staff member.

In these due process proceedings, the burden of proof is on the employer. You must be able to show that the school system has taken steps to correct problems and that, in spite of these steps, the problems persist. You must also demonstrate that the board's termination proceedings are fair and impartial.

> ***"Boards get into trouble when firing tenured teachers because they don't follow proper procedures. The most important part of the process is providing proof that you have given notice of deficiencies along with appropriate attempts to find a remedy to the problems."***
> ***—Board member, Connecticut***

Fundamental principles of due process

The fundamental principles of due process—as applied to the termination of tenured staff—are the employees' rights:

- To written notice of the specific reasons for termination.
- To a hearing at which they may be present to respond to district allegations and present rebuttal.
- To have their attorney present a full legal defense, including testimony and cross-examination of witnesses.
- To protection against arbitrary rulings.
- To an impartial decision based on the evidence in the record.
- To review (by the superintendent, the board, or a court, depending on the level at which a final decision is made).

Key questions to ask

- Does the board understand due process?
- Does it understand the difference between due process as it applies to staff termination and as it applies to student suspension or discipline?
- Does the board have a policy that requires that employees receive adequate notice of problems, assistance, and opportunity for improvement?
- Does anything in the standard employment contract (or a negotiated agreement with a union) require further action or adherence to an agreed-upon termination procedure?

Policy action indicated

As a practical matter, your board needs a policy on adverse actions. The amount of detail required in your due process language depends on whether specific procedures and requirements are included in your state law or collective bargaining provisions. The termination policy should reaffirm that your board has the legal right to terminate an employee for just cause and according to law. It's best to have separate termination policies for professional and support staff, even though these policies may be similar in wording and content. Have your school lawyer review your policies periodically to ensure that they comply with the latest laws and court rulings. Above all, make sure that all due process procedures (especially notice requirements) are strictly followed by the administration.

Reduction-in-force

Tight budgets, change in curriculum or program direction, and general shifts in the application of federal and state aid to public education have forced many school boards to look more often at restructuring professional and support staff assignments. This problem has become increasingly apparent to school boards facing America's shifting population trends and general decline in public school enrollment.

The outcome has been the emergence of "reduction-in-force" (RIF). Veteran school board members share personal reservations about that which is inherent in this process—about its emotional and sociological impact; and they point out that a RIF also presents the school board with a host of procedural problems.

Some heavy problems

These are some of the problems boards must resolve when facing RIFS:

The seniority issue. Many teachers naturally feel that seniority should matter when staff layoffs are warranted. Cutting from the bottom in terms of experience presents an objective and impartial method of achieving the necessary cuts. However, as many board members point out, this consideration may be equitable, but it is loaded with problems:

- It does not account for cutbacks tailored to program realignment.
- It does not account for competency among teachers. Your board could lose a highly qualified teacher, while it keeps a more experienced, but perhaps less efficient one.
- It also can fly in the face of equal employment opportunity initiatives. Since increased hiring of women and minorities has been a fairly recent phenomenon, many of these em-

"Nobody regrets having to let teachers go more than the school board. Doing away with somebody's job is the most difficult thing I have to do as a board member."
—Board member, New York

"You spend what seems to be a lifetime attracting the best teachers you can find. It's disheartening to have to tell them hard times have arrived and you have to let them go."
—Board member, Oklahoma

ployees are at the bottom of the seniority scale.

The legal issue. In some states, boards have found that their state legislators have imposed rules or laws governing reduction-in-force. Some boards must provide extraordinary severance payments. Others must give rehiring preference in future vacancies. Often, boards discover that union lobbying of the legislature has locked the board into rigid criteria (seniority is a common one) for selecting which teachers or staff will receive RIF notices.

The staffing issue. Many boards have found that RIFs force them to put a premium on teachers who are certified to teach in more than one area. This shifting of personnel often results in assigning extra duties or less attractive teaching assignments to teachers—not exactly a popular trend with professional staff members.

The community issue. Like post offices, schools are one of the anchor points of a community's identity, and the public can be very sensitive to the implications of a RIF. Businessmen are often concerned that the district is no longer attracting new people to the area. Parents worry that the reduction will mean less education for their children. Says one board member, "We try to make sure that the community understands all of the ramifications of a reduction-in-force."

Key questions to ask

○ Has the board prepared for reductions in force by anticipating problems?

○ Has the board provided for long-range planning to identify likely actions to be taken in the event a RIF is indicated?

○ Has the board done any ground work with the staff for a RIF (or with staff unions in states with collective bargaining)?

○ Does the board have adequate documentation with which to explain and, if necessary, justify an impending RIF?

○ Has the board identified likely RIF "volunteers," such as employees who are qualified for retirement? Can you offer "early out" retirement options?

○ Has the board's counsel reviewed state laws to be sure that your RIF policies conform? What about its union contract?

○ Has the board affirmed its right to select the process by which the RIF will be conducted?

Policy action indicated

Your board's policy should contain language concerning its criteria for giving continued employment preference to various categories of employees. It might also include a general policy statement that RIFs will be achieved by attrition when feasible. It should also account for complying with the terms of any negotiated agreements the board has made.

"We identify teachers of more than one subject. We also shift people around to different schools or buildings. Many teachers and parents don't like that at all."
—Board member, Delaware

Grievance and hearing procedures

> ***"Problems are usually solved somewhere along the line. The number of steps a complainant might go through would depend on the organizational structure of the school district."***
> ***—Board member, Kentucky***

In any relationship between people—and especially in an employer/employee relationship—some conflict is inevitable. Although the specific procedures vary greatly from state to state, many school boards depend upon an internal, formal administrative procedure for resolving employee grievances.

A grievance procedure should begin with an informal attempt to resolve the problem with the employee's immediate supervisor. If this initial step does not provide relief the complainant finds satisfactory, most grievance procedures allow for a written complaint and response at the same level, and subsequent appeal on a step-by-step basis up through the chain of command. Finally, if the employee is still not satisfied with the administrative response, a typical grievance procedure would allow for further appeal in the form of a hearing before the superintendent or, in some cases, the school board.

> ***"If it gets to us, it has already gone through the principal, an assistant superintendent, and the superintendent. We must then either find legitimate proof our administrators made a wrong decision, or support their decision."***
> ***—Board member, Texas***

It should be welcomed

A formal grievance procedure is an efficient way to resolve employee problems. It can provide the school system with an objective means of focusing on the facts underlying employee complaints, and can be useful in locating operational weaknesses that might otherwise be overlooked.

It also has another benefit: It is a relatively simple procedure for receiving a complaint and resolving it through due process. Says one board member: "A board ought to be able to say 'please do' when an employee says he or she will file a grievance. It's a procedure that's workable and that has an end: Either you lose or win."

There are downsides

Despite the general endorsement a formal grievance procedure receives from board members, many acknowledge that deciding whether the administration erred in its dealing with the complainant can be difficult for a board concerned about its relationship with both its administrative team and its employees. "It's a tough position to be in," says one board member.

> ***"It's very easy to get personal, but that's not the purpose of the hearing."***
> ***—Board member, West Virginia***

It can also be burdensome, adds another: "It requires your time; you have to sit there and listen, and possibly make tough decisions. If the union is mad at you, it sometimes decides to load you down with hearings."

In order to avoid these problems, some boards have delegated the authority to make a final decision on employee grievances to the superintendent. This, of course, requires that your state law allows such delegation.

Some advice

Here's what board members advise a board to do in conducting a grievance hearing:

- ○ Let the chairman preside with as little interference from other board members as feasible.
- ○ Direct all questions to the chairman.
- ○ Follow parliamentary procedure in the hearing.
- ○ Remain impartial and objective.

Two notable exceptions

Although many boards control the grievance and hearing procedure, there are two notable exceptions to that control.

In states where boards engage in collective bargaining, a central issue in these contract negotiations is the grievance procedure. Very often, boards that bargain end up with a grievance procedure that includes a form of arbitration. Contract provisions generally require attempts to resolve the issues. However, if internal procedures don't resolve the grievance, the employee can request that the issues be submitted to an arbitrator, whose decision on the issue becomes binding on both parties. If your board bargains, it should be aware during negotiations of the potential for negotiating away a substantial amount of control over its grievance procedure.

The second exception to board control is provisions of state law that require boards to submit grievances for outside arbitration or provide that a board decision can be further appealed to the courts. Your board should be aware of these legal restrictions and should approach any grievance proceeding with full attention to the technical, procedural requirements of this quasi-judicial process.

PERSONNEL POLICY HELP

What kind of policies do you need? Obviously, the size of your school district and its operating structure will determine how many and what kind of personnel policies are required. Your state school boards association may have a policy development assistance program that can help you in this area. In addition, the National School Boards Association's Educational Policies Service identifies dozens of personnel policies school boards require. If your board decides to seek help in personnel policy development, it should ask for specific proposals tailored to the needs of the district.

The following list includes many of the key personnel policies school boards should have:

- Board/staff communications.
- Personnel records.
- Complaints and grievance procedures.
- Contracts and compensation plans.
- Probation and tenure.
- Seniority.
- Assignments and transfers.
- Evaluation of staff.
- Reduction-in-force.
- Resignation and retirement.
- Suspension and dismissal of staff.
- Equal opportunity employment (nondiscrimination).
- Conflicts of interest and ethics.
- Rules of conduct.
- Health and safety.
- Worker's compensation.
- Staff development opportunities.
- Staff visitations and conferences.
- Reimbursement for educational expenses.
- In-service training.
- Participation in political activities.
- Gifts and solicitations.
- Smoking on school grounds by staff members.
- Part-time and substitute employment.
- Staff time schedules.
- Workload and extra duty.
- Staff meetings.
- Nonschool employment by staff members.

What you should know about the school district management team

YEA
TEAM
SMT
SMT

You have probably heard of the school district management team. You might know it by other names: administrative team, administrative council or cabinet, advocate team, coalition administration, shared decision making, or collegial team. One may be operating in your district, even if you have not given it one of these names. On the other hand, you might think your district has an active management team, when it actually does not.

The concept of team management is an illusory one, but one that is advocated today as a workable approach to managing the public schools. When asked to describe the structure of a management team, or how such a team functions and operates, both board members and school administrators are hard-pressed. This is easy to understand, because each district interprets the management team in its own way. Interpretation of team management is affected by:

- The size of the district, both in staff and territory.
- The local negotiations picture as it affects school administrators, including legal requirements and restrictions.
- The superintendent's personal style.
- Assumptions about the people who work there and how they can or should work together.

***"Almost all school systems today have some semblance of a management team. It may be loosely organized; it may be ineffective; it may be autocratic; it may be bureaucratic; but it is around somewhere."* —Superintendent, Nebraska**

***"High noon is here. We must run, not walk, toward our words. Talking about the management team will no longer work. We must implement it or forget it!"* —Principal, Washington**

"The board should allow the superintendent to surround himself with the team of his choice. If you have selected your superintendent wisely, you should feel confident that his selections will be just as wise. He will know where he will need advice and where he will have to search for advisors." —Board member, Tennessee

A working definition

Because of the confusion that often surrounds the management team concept, many experts begin to define the management team by stating what it is *not.*

- Foremost, *the management team is not a means of delegating or usurping the power and responsibility of the board.* The management team possesses no inherent authority in the school district. Team members do not vote, nor does the majority rule on decisions. Simply put, team management allows for participatory decision making, but the final responsibility for policy decisions lies with the board. (Note: Because each district defines the team in its own way, the team's management role may vary. Your team may only advise the superintendent, or it could have some control over all or some final administrative decisions.)
- *The management team is not, by this book's definition, a board-administrative team*—the two main components of which are the school board and the superintendent. (It's a matter of syntax, however. Some districts call their board-administrative team their "management team," which is separate and different from their "administrative team," which is being defined here.) The board delegates the implementation of its policies and the management of the schools to the superintendent and staff—the school district management team. Because the superintendent is accountable for managing the schools, he is responsible for organizing the team.

Ordinarily, anyone who occupies a management or supervisory role serves on the team, including assistant superintendents, central office directors, managers and supervisors, and school principals and assistant principals. But there is no perfect team structure. Some teams might include only the superintendent and his top assistants; others might have a cross section of representatives from various groups in the district, including principals, teachers, secretaries, parents, and students.

The team structure might be topical, such as a "Curriculum Team" or a "Maintenance Team." There might be *ad hoc* teams of selected experts, knowledgeable in their special areas, serving on a team that will disband once its recommendations are accepted by the central administrative team. There can be standing and *ad hoc* committees of a team. Whatever the structure, the superintendent is the team leader.

- *The management team is not a team only when it meets.* One is a member of the team at all times, and the team exists at all times as the operation of the district moves forward.
- *Team management is not a method for accepting and accommodating everyone's wishes.*
- *Team management is not consolidated management of which advice is requested only on problems.*

The management team is an advisory and deliberative body for the superintendent of schools. It also advises the superintendent, formulates proposals, and drafts policy for the superintendent to recommend to the board.

"There isn't a superintendent in the world who is smart enough to sit in his office and know the possible impact of every new policy on each school. The superintendent and board need the knowledge that management personnel in the district have." —Principal, Kentucky

Why have a team?

Because of the complexities of administering schools today, some educators believe that the management style for the future must be by a team of administrators.

For more effective policy. Each time a school board makes policy, and every time a superintendent makes an administrative decision, there are side effects—some anticipated, some not. The superintendent must realize that mid-level administrators out in the field know more about what the impact of a policy will be on the operation of that school than he does.

In essence, better policy and better policy implementation will result when those who have to implement a policy are given a chance to comment on the impact of that policy *before* it is adopted.

For better relationships with middle-management. Some districts have implemented the management team in an effort to keep middle management from unionizing. As one New Jersey school leader put it: "If the attitudes of top management are dictatorial rather than participatory, the ground then becomes fertile for unionization of middle management. Where school administrators are *truly* partners in the management team, they usually do not adopt a union posture."

For improved communication. Using the management team approach to school administration can help improve district communication. Each team member is responsible for disseminating

"Team management is a legitimate means of developing a 'unified front' in response to growing pressures and demands."
—Superintendent, Oregon

"With team management, the board should see more educational program success and have more assurance of a well-managed school system. The board can make more effective decisions and policies under these conditions."
—Superintendent, Texas

"I have found some drawbacks. There is a loss of confidentiality, for instance. When we have a meeting and we talk about people or events, somehow this becomes common knowledge in hours. But I believe the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages."
—Superintendent, Pennsylvania

information to staff members under his charge, for promoting understanding of the total school program, and for ensuring its effective operation. The superintendent is responsible for keeping team members informed of board decisions and activities. Conversely, the team is responsible for informing the superintendent (who then informs the board) about suggestions and problems originating from the school staff.

Roadblocks to team management

If team management can do all these things for a district, why isn't every district committed to it? There are numerous reasons:

- ○ Some boards feel that total commitment to the team concept could mean agreeing to built-in delays and frustrations in certain areas of decision making.
- ○ If the input of the team is important, enough time must be allowed for team members to get information, digest it, and transmit their contributions.
- ○ Old leadership styles change slowly. While still responsible for final decisions, the superintendent will have to rely heavily on the contributions of the team. The superintendent may be unwilling to relinquish absolute authority. Also, there must be the understanding that if team input is ignored too often, the team will begin to disintegrate.
- ○ Other team members, especially school-based administrators, might be unwilling to devote the increased time a team role would require.
- ○ It takes time to build openness and trust among team members.
- ○ Management teams can create a more complex bureaucracy than the structures they purport to replace. They may become too large and unwieldy to be effective.
- ○ Continuous review and clarification of roles, expectations, tasks, and other blueprints of the management team are needed. This takes time, organization, and planning.
- ○ Communication is just as difficult to achieve and as essential to effective team operations as in any other organizational structure. Team management by itself does not ensure clarity and effectiveness of communication.
- ○ Many district employees may not be able to work compatibly on the same management team, such as members of different collective bargaining units.
- ○ The superintendent and team members may not have the skills necessary for an effective team operation.

"Wilson, team management is looked upon as a legitimate means of developing a 'unified front', however...."

The board's role

If your superintendent and board make decisions that affect a school in your district without involving the principal of that building, this is evidence that your district does not support participatory management.

If your board wants participatory decision making, its first responsibility is to say so in policy. This policy should define the roles of the board, the superintendent, and the school management team. It should address basic issues, leaving no doubt as to the board's commitment and the staff's obligations. It should *not* spell out team operational details. The board should make certain that middle management is involved in the development of the policy.

A management team policy should have the following elements:

- ○ A statement of the board's belief that the management team will improve the overall governance of the district and a commitment to considering the team's advice before making major decisions.
- ○ The legal standing of the team. This section should state that the board and superintendent are still accountable for decisions, and that the team will act in an advisory capacity.

"Insistence and action on the part of the board is necessary to make a management team work. If the superintendent does not share decision making voluntarily, the board must require him to involve other administrators. Here is where enlightened board members play a crucial role."
—Superintendent, Kentucky

ABSOLUTE
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"He never lets anyone forget who is superintendent!"

- ○ The general makeup of the team itself, and a provision for appointment of team members by the superintendent.
- ○ The specific tasks for which the team will be responsible.

Once the board sets the policy that establishes the management team, it must monitor its operation and see to it that the superintendent makes it work.

SUGGESTION

For more information about the administrative team, read The Administrative Leadership Team: The Board's Role in Selecting the Administrative Team, *and* Compensating the Administrative Team, *two books published jointly by* AASA *and* NSBA.

"Our board's main communication with the team is through the superintendent. Board members do not attend management team meetings. Periodically, we do hold dinner meetings with the entire team."
—Board member, Washington

IS THERE TEAM MANAGEMENT IN YOUR DISTRICT?

(Answer these questions to find out)

Responding to the following list of questions will help you, as a board member or as a board, determine the degree to which your district uses the management team approach to decision making. You may need to undertake some research in order to make a correct assessment.

Yes	No	Partially or Sometimes	
☐	☐	☐	1. Has the board adopted a policy statement regarding the management of the district?
☐	☐	☐	2. Are administrators welcome at board meetings?
☐	☐	☐	3. Does the board publicly recognize and support the efforts of district administrators?
☐	☐	☐	4. Do administrators understand and support board action?
☐	☐	☐	5. Do administrators have the opportunity to react to proposed board policy or administrative regulation *before* it is adopted?
☐	☐	☐	6. Do administrators have adequate input in the employment, promotion, and dismissal decisions concerning school employees?
☐	☐	☐	7. Have job descriptions been prepared for all district administrators?
☐	☐	☐	8. Does the district have a formal evaluation procedure for all administrators? If so, did administrators have substantial involvement in the development of the evaluation instruments?
☐	☐	☐	9. Have procedures been developed to achieve effective communication between and among all levels of the management team?
☐	☐	☐	10. Do administrators have an opportunity to suggest items for the agenda of the administrative meetings?
☐	☐	☐	11. During administrative meetings, are administrators encouraged to express their views including those that might be contrary to those held by the majority, or to those of the superintendent?
☐	☐	☐	12. Are administrators substantially involved in the development of the school district budget?

11

SCHOOL BOARDS AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

"Many school board leaders believe that if we don't talk about collective bargaining, it will go away. The fact that there are 33 states that have collective bargaining laws for teachers is proof that this is erroneous thinking."
—Executive director, NSBA

Have teachers traditionally been underpaid? That's a question that can be argued effectively on both sides within the broad framework of "compared to what?" But the question is moot. Fact or not, the notion teachers are underpaid has gained such wide circulation for so many years that people believe it to be true with all the zeal of children believing in Santa Claus.

More to the point is the fact that teachers and other school employees are seeking better compensation through the collective bargaining process. Many school boards, though aware of the economics, express far deeper concern over collective bargaining's impact on local control. These board members view collective bargaining as an ominous process undermining the sanctity of local control:

○ "Collective bargaining is a grant of power to teachers and other employees at the expense of the school board and school administrators."

○ "Collective bargaining is simply big union vs. little school board; well-heeled, experienced union members taking from poor, ill-prepared boards of education."

○ "The American people need to wake up to the fact that the control of public education is being transferred from their own representatives to the leadership of the local and state teacher unions."

"School boards need to unite in an effort to amend collective bargaining laws so that 'giving away the store' becomes impossible."
—Board member, Nebraska

"But, Ed, all I said was 'collective bargaining starts next week'!"

Truths or myths?

Are these perceptions of collective bargaining accurate? Again, the question is moot. Like the belief that teachers are underpaid, the belief among board members that collective bargaining is threatening to local control—whether it is or not—is enough to make them *feel* threatened. The result is that collective bargaining becomes, in addition to being an objective concern, a highly charged emotional issue.

Regardless of whether your state allows or requires collective bargaining for school system employees, the unionization of teachers and other staff will have some impact on your board. If your district does not negotiate contracts with employee organizations, your isolation from the process is lessened by several indirect pressures. Recognizing them will help you deal with them:

- ○ Employees may want to bargain. If they put pressure on the state legislature or on your board to initiate the process, you need to know how collective bargaining works (and does not work) in order to respond or influence the legislature's decision.
- ○ Union pressures and tactics may assist your board in developing a positive employer-employee relationship without negotiating with a union.

If you are already involved in collective bargaining, your success or failure as a party to the process will depend largely on how you handle it.

If you and your colleagues are to master the process of collective bargaining, you must have a clear understanding of what it is, how it affects the board, and what techniques can be used by your board to maintain control of education in your district.

Collective bargaining can be or become all of the ominous things described by board members who oppose the process. However, it can also be a process by which your board can strengthen its position and reassert its authority over matters pertaining to the schools.

The difference is preparation

As a board member, you may never get to the bargaining table. Your role may be limited to being part of the negotiating team, an observer, or to the supporting role of establishing the policy and bargaining packages the board's chief negotiator will offer. That doesn't mean, however, that you cannot draw on the experience of the other boards and experts to better prepare yourself—or whomever you send to the table—for negotiating a fair, equitable, and reasonable contract.

"The attitude that your board demonstrates during the collective bargaining process will affect (for good or ill) teachers' attitudes about teaching in the district and, consequently, the quality of the instruction that is provided."
—Superintendent, Pennsylvania

Defining collective bargaining

"If we set too hard of a line in collective bargaining, we will lose our good teachers to other industries. We may save a few bucks now at the expense of quality education later on."
—Board member, New York

Many states have passed statutes governing public employer/employee relations which allow or require collective bargaining between school boards and unions. Some of these states provide for collective bargaining, but exclude the right to strike. Other states have no laws requiring collective bargaining with public sector employees, or they have laws that prohibit collective bargaining with public employees.

The natural assumption, then, would be that boards which fall into the latter category of states do not engage in collective bargaining. Not so. The absence of a collective bargaining law has not prevented school boards in states like Illinois and Ohio from entering into formal, negotiated contracts. Numerous boards have negotiated contracts with both teachers and non-teaching employees.

Some boards blame themselves or their administration for the formal organization of teachers—a tendency that is quite common and may extend to your board. However, teachers often organize for reasons totally beyond the control of both local boards and administrators, such as the growth of a district resulting in a bureaucracy with reduced lines of communication, shortages of jobs locking teachers into one district, and the growth in the number of primary family wage earners engaged in the teaching profession.

Some form of formal employee involvement in establishing salaries and working conditions and benefits may be inevitable in most districts. Teachers have been led to believe that if they do not have a contract, they are second-class citizens. Counteracting that kind of belief, delaying union recognition, and other board resistance to collective bargaining must take into account the needs and attitudes of employees and the public to be successful. The private corporate sector offers some alternatives to unions.

Regardless of whether your board now has union bargaining, one thing is certain: Boards that carefully analyze and adapt their style of employee relations to include greater employee involvement, as well as reasonable consideration of the desires and needs of employees, will have fewer problems with collective bargaining and other activities of organized labor.

"Collective bargaining puts the union and management on opposite sides. Nevertheless, this adversary relationship does not have to lead to intensive conflict."
—Board member, Illinois

The board's role in collective bargaining

"I'm finding this whole process of collective bargaining a test of my ingenuity, judgment, teamwork, and timing!"

> ***"We have some hotheads on our board. Every time they sit at the bargaining table, we wind up heading for binding arbitration."***
> ***—Board member, Maine***

Successful approaches to collective bargaining vary from school district to school district, and from negotiation to negotiation. Obviously, your board's ability to balance concern for the public interest with meeting the needs of district employees will depend upon many factors within and outside of its control. You and your colleagues are likely to find the whole process a test of your ingenuity, judgment, teamwork, and timing.

Although every contract negotiation is different, your board can count on one thing: The ability to plan and to clearly communicate throughout the process will be a key factor in avoiding the type of conflicts that arise in collective bargaining when misunderstandings polarize the parties around issues that would or would not otherwise be negotiable.

> ***"Elected officials should be removed from the effects of political pressure exerted on them in tense negotiating phases. They shouldn't be at the table."***
> ***—Board member, Wisconsin***

Why are planning and communication at each phase of the process especially important? Because your board will not likely be sitting at the bargaining table. The majority of board members and other collective bargaining experts strongly advise that board members should be informed about every nuance of the process, but should keep their distance from the bargaining table. Thus, your board will need to carefully structure its role so that its members and its bargaining "agents" do not surprise each other during the lengthy negotiations process.

There are a number of reasons for keeping yourselves detached from the actual bargaining:

- ○ Most board members are not paid for board service and already commit many hours to just handling the normal flow of school business that comes to the board meeting. When serious negotiations are underway, the time demanded of the negotiators is extensive. Even if a board member could spare the time, often that time would be taken at the expense of completing other board business.
- ○ Expertise is a major factor. Negotiating a contract involves a good deal of detail. A negotiator should be aware of most facets of the school district's business, should have some grounding in contract law, and should certainly have knowledge and experience in the various elements of collective bargaining.
- ○ Board members who make themselves a part of the negotiations are much more vulnerable to direct personal attack or political pressure than board "agents." This can impede progress because many discussions and comments will be directed at the board member rather than the chief negotiator. It also is easier for board members to find themselves in a conflict of interest or a "no-win" situation when they must later vote to accept or reject a contract they helped to negotiate.

"Sometimes it seems that since we have had collective bargaining, we spend all our time at the bargaining table and none on school business." —Board member, Vermont

It's already personal enough

Negotiation "experts" seeking to make the case for keeping board members out of the physical negotiations point to a number of areas in which the negotiations can get highly personal, and in which the presence of a board member may inhibit progress:

- Discussions require frankness and candor, and board member presence—for any number of reasons—can inhibit this dialogue.
- The chief negotiator must exert a degree of leadership and power, and board member presence can undermine this authority.
- Derogatory remarks are sometimes made about the board, its members, or management. Attending board members can be tempted to mount a defense or, worse, may find these attacks affecting their judgments when administrators or other personnel are being evaluated by the board. Some union negotiators use the "divide and conquer" technique when both the board and administration sit across the table.
- When snags develop in negotiations, board member negotiators, who are used to being involved in the decision-making process, have a tendency to overstep their bounds with an individual (and often improper) decision.

In essence, the "experts" point out that board members should not take on the complications of actually sitting in at the bargaining table, since the collective bargaining process is already personally taxing for board members. That point is underscored by numerous board members who candidly admit having some resentment for the collective bargaining process. Many of these members do not like what unionism has done to their relationship with teachers and other employees. They feel that board authority is being sacrificed, and question the tactics unions use to secure their demands.

Some personal tales

The personal experiences of numerous board members who have been through collective bargaining indicate that two of the greatest personal strains the process places on board members are demands of time and the not infrequent personal attacks made on board member negotiators:

- "I just sat there in amazement, wondering who these people were and why they were saying these horrible things about me."
- "I headed our negotiations. My kids felt neglected. I had guilt feelings. My family life was disrupted, and I became abrupt with people. I tried telling myself that it would be over soon....but it wasn't."
- "It seems like the whole world is against you, because most of the telephone calls are from people who *are* against you. Those who support you rarely feel the need to call."
- "It turned out to be one of the biggest issues my children were ever involved in. They heard about it all day long at school."
- "There's nothing quite like coming out of an all-night bargaining session and realizing that you still have a job to do and a whole day's work at the office ahead of you...and, in all probability, the teacher representatives don't."
- "I told our union representatives that the day they put up picket lines in front of my house would be the day I'd quit the board. Since they preferred to keep me on the board, I never got picketed."

"I'm always a little bothered by board member involvement in negotiations. The board member has no individual authority for making decisions or taking action; but, in theory, that's exactly what he or she is doing when negotiating." —Board member, California

Try to keep a balance

Despite all of the advice to the contrary, some boards have chosen to involve their members directly in negotiations. In some cases, this has been very successful, depending on the individuals participating. Either way, the best approach your board can take to collective bargaining is to keep its balance.

While you may agree with the board member who noted, "The unions have lost little time in testing the limits of our inherent managerial rights," you and your board colleagues must temper your efforts to maintain control with the presumption that you will bargain in good faith.

As another board member points out: "Our teachers' demands are realistic. They are concerned with teaching, benefits, and welfare. They are not trying to take over the district." Your board should keep in mind that its employees are one of the publics it serves.

In essence, the board's major role in collective bargaining is unchanged even if it chooses to allow individual members to participate in negotiations. That role is to protect the public interest by taking a posture consistent with the board's overall role as policy maker.

Tips on policy development

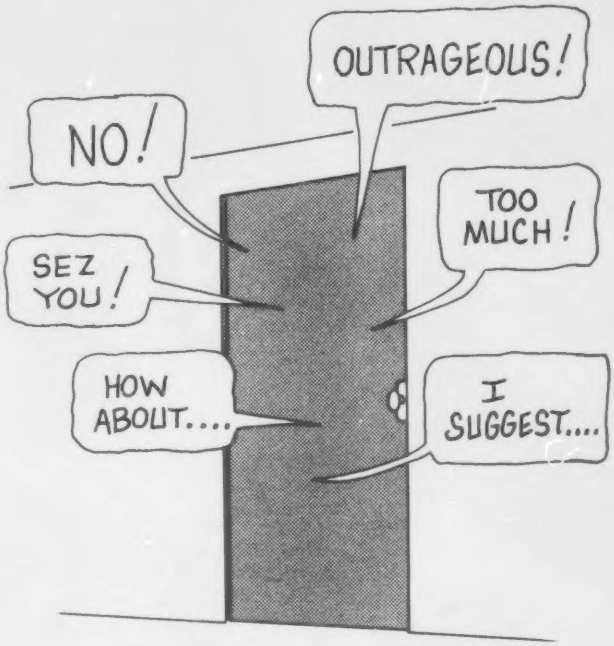
To fulfill their role properly, many school boards establish policy that defines their role in collective bargaining, stating that the board will:

- Negotiate in good faith; with fairness to the board, the community, and to the employees as a primary goal.
- Be responsible for setting the scope of the negotiations.
- Express its positions at the bargaining table through its chief negotiator, and appoint an official spokesman to communicate these positions to the community, media, and other interested parties.
- Keep its negotiating team informed, and require that the negotiating team keep the board informed of all developments.
- Attempt to resolve differences of opinion among members of the board, and arrive at consensus or a clear majority position on all issues.
- Appoint the most competent negotiating team available.
- Plan for contingencies or emergencies.
- Create the guidelines under which the contract will be administered once it is negotiated, ratified, and signed by the parties.

HANDLING YOUR ROLE IN THE PROCESS

Simply stated, your role in the collective bargaining process is to remain objective, to do your homework, to be a team player, and to keep your wits and sense of humor intact. This list of board member responsibilities should help you personally cope with collective bargaining:

- *Examine every action and statement* in light of the possibility that the role of the board as a policy maker will be compromised if you allow employees' representatives to bargain individually with you, as a board member, rather than your negotiating team.
- *Brief your family* on the extent of time you anticipate the board will have to spend on the negotiation process. Work out a family plan for coping with your periodic absences.
- *Do your homework* to ensure that you understand the range and scope of the negotiations.
- *Do your arguing behind closed doors.* The unity your board presents in negotiations is vital to its success; so you and your colleagues should hammer out differences in executive session. Never leave that session with plans to take a public position different from that decided upon by the majority.
- *Participate in the designation of an official spokesman* who will maintain communication with constituents, civic leaders, and other political entities; and agree on a process by which the board (through the spokesman or chief negotiator) will correct misinformation, untruths, or rumors that might surface during negotiations.
- *Maintain a personally positive and non-reactive stance* throughout the negotiations. Believe that the process will end successfully and, above all, don't interpret personally statements or tactical moves by employees or their representative.


OUTRAGEOUS!
NO!
TOO MUCH!
SEZ YOU!
HOW ABOUT....
I SUGGEST....

- *Stay in constant touch* with other board members, the superintendent, and the negotiating team. Don't leave information to chance. If you have a question, ask it.
- *Participate in seeking assistance* from state or national school boards associations and other agencies, and study the materials they provide.

Selecting the negotiating team

One of the earliest decisions to make when confronted with collective bargaining will be who will negotiate for the district. In virtually all school districts, the key choice for the school board is the selection of a chief negotiator. Most often, a board will ask its superintendent to recommend someone to head up the board's negotiating team.

The chief negotiator will do most of the hard bargaining at the table. Ideally, he will do much more, such as:

○ Consulting the board and administration on selecting the remainder of the negotiating team.

○ Recommending the roles and responsibilities to be undertaken by the board, the administration, and the negotiating team.

○ Assisting the board in preparing for the negotiations and setting its goals and strategies.

○ Communicating throughout the process with the board and others on the progress of negotiations; areas where the negotiating team needs further board guidance; and on how the negotiations are conforming to the parameters and guidelines set out by the board.

With that degree of responsibility, it is obvious that a board needs a chief negotiator of considerable competence. He will need a firm grounding in school business, substantial knowledge of the law—particularly contract law—and he must be a person with demonstrated communication skills.

The chief negotiator should not be a board member. Among other reasons, board members with the qualifications and skills required of a chief negotiator are extremely rare. Even if you have an expert negotiator on the board, his role as a board member will be difficult, if not impossible, to merge with his role as the board's chief negotiating agent.

Many boards look to the administrative team as the logical choice for a chief negotiator. It is quite common for the ability to negotiate to be a criterion for the selection of a superintendent. Other boards seek a personnel director, staff relations director, or other senior administrator with specific training in labor negotiations.

However, some experts and board members with expertise in collective bargaining say tapping the district's administrative team for negotiations carries some of the same stumbling blocks associated with having board members negotiate:

○ Administrators are susceptible to pressure and personal attack.

○ Participation in collective bargaining does not enhance the administrator's relationship with the district's employees.

○ The presence of the superintendent can inhibit forthright discussions.

○ The adversary relationship of negotiations can undermine the staff's trust and respect for the administrator. An administrator can also discover that acrimony arising from negotiations can compromise his role as an evaluator of employee performance under the eventual contract.

On the other hand, good managers should be prepared for handling the "management" role in negotiations. An efficient, effective superintendent (or other administrator) knows that managing is not a popularity contest.

"Anyone who tries to function simultaneously as the board's chief negotiator and strategist and chief cultivator of positive employer/employee relationships is likely to wind up with a badly split personality."
—Board member, Michigan

Why do board members and administrators bargain?

The obvious question arises: Why do board members and administrators so often become involved in negotiations?

Two of the answers are:

○ *Money.* Many boards simply don't have the financial ability to keep a labor relations consultant on call or on staff the way they would an attorney.

○ *Genuine expertise.* Some boards feel that one (or more) of their members or administrators possesses superior negotiating skills.

While the right mix of board member and administrator abilities and personalities occasionally might work in one district, in another district with different board members or a different administrative team, such an approach can lead to disaster.

The case for a professional negotiator

Exceptions aside, most boards find the money to hire a professional negotiator, simply because a professional is a good investment. The board and superintendent are likely to feel comfortable accepting a consultant's recommendations as practical and logical solutions to problems and confusions on collective bargaining. Moreover, since the professional negotiator maintains steady contact with arbitrators, as well as state and union officials, the board gains an edge when the time comes for mediation. A good consultant can make his fee appear to be a negligible expense merely by skillful negotiation of employee salary provisions.

Some advice

In its publication, "How to Make Collective Bargaining Work for Your District," the California School Boards Association (CSBA) advises its member districts to follow a set process for deciding if the negotiating team should come from inside or outside the school system:

"The skills, experience, and abilities of the local staff must be analyzed in light of the qualities you demand in your chief negotiator. The main consideration should be that the contract is too important to be negotiated by someone ill-prepared or unfamiliar with the process. Another important factor to consider is whether the conflicts inherent in the bargaining process will hinder this staff person's effectiveness in performing his or her regular job duties."

CSBA advises that if no internal person can meet these criteria, "your district's needs may be best met by obtaining qualified assistance." State associations, labor law firms, private consultants, and administrators from other districts are likely sources for help with:

- Comparing the cost of their services to the cost of adding an additional staff person with expertise in labor relations.
- Supplying information on state reimbursement of collective bargaining costs.
- Providing the district with an experienced at-the-table negotiator.

SUGGESTION

Since one of the major objections board members have to collective bargaining is the surrender of local control, your board should arrive at an understanding with its outside negotiator that his role will be advisory in nature, and that the board will determine the parameters under which he will negotiate.

WHAT A LABOR RELATIONS CONSULTANT CAN DO FOR YOU

The services of a labor relations consultant must be tailor-made for the school system that retains him. The manner and extent of service usually are dictated by the needs of the school system and the availability of in-house labor relations expertise. The full range of a consultant's custom services might include:

- Negotiating contracts and agreements with employee bargaining units.
- Supporting the board in mediation and fact-finding procedures.
- Assisting in the determination and settlement of grievances, including involvement in grievance arbitration proceedings.
- Helping handle elections and unfair labor charges.
- Advising, guiding, and assisting in all the foregoing matters, including time spent in investigation, travel, research, drafting, typing, proposal preparation, and contract negotiations.

Preparing for negotiations

"Planning for negotiations is a year-round process. We have an assistant superintendent for personnel....He continuously observes contracts of other districts and keeps an ear out for what the union's up to."* *—Board member, Nebraska

In the opinion of one veteran negotiator for school districts, "Successful negotiating is one part face-to-face discussion and nine parts homework." Obviously, the input a board will have to negotiations (and, to a large degree, the outcome of those negotiations) will depend upon how well the board arms its negotiating team.

Collective bargaining requires preparation that is lengthy, detailed, logical, and thoughtful. Long before the process of negotiating begins, the board must provide a clear sense of the direction it intends to take in negotiating and how it intends to reach the objective of securing a reasonable contract.

In preparing for negotiations, boards should account for local variables. Although your board may have consulted other districts, private consultants, or state and national organizations, it should realize that questions of dynamics can substantially alter the standard steps for preparing to negotiate.

The 'meteorology' of preparation

The atmosphere of the board's negotiations is one way local variables might lead to making adjustments in the procedural process of preparing negotiators. Old cliches like "checking the weather" or "seeing which way the wind is blowing" are applicable.

"We established a negotiations committee of board members and administrators. They attended state association workshops on collective bargaining and returned with a host of new approaches."* *—Board member, Wisconsin

For example, the size of the school district will affect the kind and extent of planning a board must do. In a smaller district, informality may be the rule, and the negotiators may know each other well. Generally, the larger the school district, the more complex negotiations become—and the more complex the items to be addressed in planning will be.

Here are some other factors that can dictate the course of the board's (and its administration's) planning activities:

The amount of pressure that exists. The board will have to modify its approach if the attitudes of teachers are particularly militant, if the district's financial position has changed markedly, or if a strike deadline is hanging over the board.

Your own attitudes. If the board is convinced that it's not going to give an inch, or if it is locked into a certain posture dictated by legal or financial considerations, planning must be adjusted to account for handling these limitations.

The current state of employee relations. If the board is in a district where employee relations are amicable, the degree of planning may be altered by the simple fact that there will be less to negotiate. Conversely, if the administrators, the board, and the employees have been engaging in a war over policy issues, planning efforts will have to include a strategy for keeping those issues off the bargaining table.

The procedural steps

Once the board has considered local adjustments, its preparation should fall into a process involving four steps. To complete these steps, the board will need to rely heavily on the administration.

1. Research the existing contract. The performance noted under an existing contract should provide the board with a quick reference to areas likely to be addressed in the upcoming negotiations. For example, if school principals report that a significant number of grievances filed under the existing contract had to do with safety considerations, the board should watch for work environment issues to come to the table. If numerous teachers took advantage of educational benefits, such as sabbatical leave or tuition reimbursement, the board can expect the union to seek to keep these benefits. The process, however, does go both ways: If the board feels the benefits are too costly, it can plan to use them as bargaining chips in exchange for concessions in other areas.

The principal function of researching the existing contract is to identify those provisions to which both parties can agree early in the negotiations and to locate weaknesses or possible sticking points that will require more detailed planning and tougher bargaining.

2. Secure wage and other information. Many factors will affect what kind of wage and benefit proposals a district can put on the table with any degree of reasonable assurance they will be accepted. Budget data, anticipated tax bases, growth projections, capital requirements, inflation rates, projected interest rates, and the direct cost of fringes will play a dual role. They will help a board frame negotiable limits for economic proposals and help to encounter union compensation demands considered to be unreasonable.

"The most important influence on the nature of the terms that will be contained in your bargaining contract is what others are getting in theirs."
—Labor relations expert, New York

Comparability is another factor. Comparative data from nearby school systems is certain to be a factor in the negotiations. Often, the first negotiated contract in a particular local area will become a bellwether for union or board negotiators, providing a basis for either escalation or moderation of demands in neighboring jurisdictions.

The comparability issue can be internally sensitive if a school district is bargaining with more than one exclusive representative (union) for separate contracts. For example, if maintenance workers agree to an eight percent pay raise, teachers may not be willing to settle for seven percent.

The importance of wage and other statistical data cannot be overstated. A settlement that is visibly inferior to other contracts in the same area will be seen by union members as a "victory" for the school board at their expense. You can be sure that union negotiators are aware of this attitude, and will seek to avoid such a "defeat."

3. Establish parameters and positions. If your board negotiates, one of the most important roles it has in the negotiating process is deciding *how* to negotiate and *what* to negotiate. Your board's first decision might be, for example, whether to "counter" or "initiate" (i.e., argue union proposals or make your own). Most boards find raising their own issues to be preferable, since it allows them to negotiate from the strength of being on the offense.

"The board should never seek a contract provision which would give the board a right or prerogative that it already has. You will end up giving up something for nothing."
—Board member, Illinois

As your board begins to map out the issues it expects to be placed on the table by either party, it should develop several positions per issue. Bargaining, after all, is a give-and-take process, and most boards (particularly on economic issues) find it useful to have a low, middle, and high-range proposal quickly at hand.

The process of establishing parameters and positions is no more than examining facts and assembling preliminary proposals that will move the negotiations toward the predetermined areas of settlement sought by the board. In other words, it is more likely that if the board's negotiators determine what they want to gain, they will be more likely to achieve it.

4. Plan a strategy. Strategy sessions should include key members of the administration, any outside negotiators the board will be using, and *every* board member. It is in the strategy sessions that most boards develop priorities for the negotiations. Also, the strategy sessions will usually include an assessment of the union's likely posture.

Some boards also use strategy discussions to address the negotiating team's attitude; how it will use procedural tactics, such as caucuses, during the negotiations; and the responsibilities of each member of the negotiating team. Legal ramifications, procedures for tentative acceptance of individual items pending resolution of remaining issues, and assessment of impasse procedures are other typical subjects on which a board would set broad advances strategies.

SUGGESTION

Take care to keep strategy discussions from becoming too specific or didactic. This will allow the board's chief negotiator maximum tactical flexibility "in the trenches." Also, monitor your conversations with union members. Intentionally or not, some board members have been known to confuse their loyalties and actually discuss board strategy with union members.

Negotiating the contract

There is no pat formula for negotiating a contract. Like snowflakes, no two negotiations are likely to be identical. They are subject to too many variables.

The board's participation in negotiations usually will be confined to:

- Keeping itself and others informed on the progress of the negotiations.
- Monitoring how its tactical strategy is being employed.
- Setting out the structure and timing for initiating the board's proposals (a key matter, if the board is going to control the tempo of the negotiations).
- Studying and responding to union proposals and, where appropriate, making decisions on counterproposals.
- Advising the negotiating team of the board's stand on various issues, including accepting, modifying, or rejecting proposals.
- Approving and signing a final agreement, if the negotiations are successful.

Again, throughout the negotiations, the board should stay in close communication with its administration and rely on administrative recommendations regarding the process of negotiations and the negotiated agreement.

The first steps

Much like baseball managers who may have totally different approaches to the playing of the game, the board's negotiators and the union's negotiators should meet before the contest begins to establish the ground rules that will apply equally to both teams, including:

- Will negotiating sessions be open or closed?
- How many members will be permitted on each negotiating team?
- What time limits will be placed on bargaining sessions, and what provisions should be made for extending or reducing the length of sessions when appropriate?
- How will meeting dates, times, and locations be determined?
- Throughout the process, how will each party communicate about the proceedings? For example, will only joint statements be issued?
- When will tentative agreements be initialed?

Bargaining in good faith

Once the parties have set out the ground rules for the negotiating process, the board will be required to negotiate in good faith. Numerous state laws and the Fair Labor Standards Act prescribe legal descriptions of good faith bargaining, and your board should be aware of how these laws apply to its negotiations. A working definition of bargaining in good faith means that the board's negotiating team:

- Meets at reasonable times and places.
- Devotes reasonable time to negotiating.
- Prepares for negotiations and comes to the table with proposals and reactions to the other side's proposals after reading them.
- Provides information necessary to intelligent bargaining.
- Bargains reasonably.
- Maintains prior agreements in later bargaining stages.
- Reduces all agreements to writing.
- Discusses all issues in detail.
- Accepts the employees' designated agent as their exclusive negotiator and does not attempt to bypass the authority of the union's representative by appealing directly to union membership.

"Now, let's begin the negotiating process!"

On the other hand, good faith bargaining does not mean that the board must make any concessions to union demands on any issues, nor does it require the board to approve and sign a contract with which it can't live. Also, good faith bargaining is a two-way street. The same requirements and limitations apply to the union.

Tracking the negotiations

During negotiations, the board will need to maintain constant contact with the negotiating team. Usually, this is accomplished through the administration. Some boards meet with their negotiators periodically to establish progress, make adjustments in strategy, discuss sticking points, and so forth. These discussions are important to school boards, largely for two reasons:

- As problems or proposals are identified, the board is in an excellent position to judge why the issue surfaced in the first place. That gives the board the advantage of assessing a union proposal in light of its ability to solve the problem, while—at the same time—assessing its impact on the district. If the board knows *why*, it can easily determine *what* is necessary, and can arm its negotiators with an appropriate counterproposal, or, if it chooses, reject the union's proposal.
- If the board has defined certain matters of policy, management prerogatives, curriculum and program development issues, and other items as "non-negotiable," it should monitor the developing issues to ensure that these matters are not subtly brought to the table. In later strategy sessions, the board may have to establish the circumstances under which it would accept impasse proceedings or a strike rather than to go beyond the limits of acceptable contract provisions. During subsequent meetings with the negotiators, the board can also reassess its earlier positions and either alter or reaffirm them.

Communication during negotiations

Tracking the negotiations also will help the board meet its responsibilities for communicating during the negotiating process. As the board's credibility is often at stake during negotiations, it must communicate clearly with the media, the community, administrators, other staff, and students throughout the negotiating process. Good communication is essential for maintaining district harmony during negotiations.

The amount of communication varies greatly from state to state. Some of the major options are:

Open negotiations. All proposals and counterproposals are made public, and all negotiating sessions are open to the press and public (although strategy sessions and caucuses remain closed).

Public announcement of initial positions. Each side is required to make public its initial set of proposals. Actual negotiating sessions and other activities remain closed, and the public is only generally informed of bargaining progress.

Closed negotiations. Specific proposals and counterproposals are not released to the public, and negotiating sessions are held behind closed doors. The parties jointly or separately inform the public on the progress of negotiations in general terms.

SOME DOS and DON'TS FOR NEGOTIATING

There is no one model of structured negotiation procedures that is guaranteed to work. There simply are too many variables within a district at any given time, or between districts, for one model to work. There are, however, a few basic "dos and don'ts" that should keep your board's negotiations clear of major pitfalls:

- *Do* maintain a positive bargaining attitude.
- *Don't* enter negotiations with a "chip on your shoulder."
- *Do* analyze all proposals thoroughly.
- *Do* ask for revisions or modifications that strengthen the efficiency or position of management.
- *Don't* advance proposals on powers, authority, or prerogatives the board already possesses.
- *Do* accept that negotiation is a give-and-take process.
- *Don't* suggest areas on which the board might be willing to compromise; wait until the other side asks for a specific concession.
- *Do* initiate proposals and make effective use of counterproposals.
- *Don't* confine bargaining solely to countering union proposals.
- *Do* stick to your guns if the issue is important.
- *Don't* cave in around threats to break off negotiations or strike.

- *Do* bargain in good faith.
- *Don't* overlook the board's right to reject any proposal or offer.
- *Do* maintain decorum in the face of personal attacks.
- *Don't* engage in derogatory comments about the unions or employees.
- *Do* check and recheck all documents before signing them.
- *Do* follow the advice of your chief negotiator or consultant on tactics and strategy.
- *Don't* give away in one clause what you have gained in another.
- *Do* allow your negotiating team flexibility to handle bargaining strategy.
- *Don't* assume that what's simple and logical to you is simple and logical to the other side.
- *Do* make sure that the contract contains a "no strike" clause and "zipper clause" language which prohibits renegotiation of contract provisions during the term of the agreement.
- *Don't* try to tear down the union, because the happiest employee is the one that will ratify the contract because he thinks he was fairly represented by management, as well as by the union.

Impasse proceedings in collective bargaining

"It became clear that they were asking for things we wouldn't give; we were beyond compromise. The decision was to end negotiations and to proceed with the legal process for resolving the impasse peacefully."
—Board member, Iowa

Just because the board agrees to sit down and negotiate in collective bargaining, it does not have a guarantee that those sessions will proceed to a contract agreeable to both sides. There are times when negotiations will break down.

The board and its negotiating team may be faced with demands that they deem unreasonable and, thus, might decide to take a chance on impasse proceedings. The board might also be faced with a union that never intended to present its contract proposals reasonably—on the presumption that impasse proceedings will force management to give up more than it wishes. In some instances, the board actually may have emerged from negotiations with a contract in hand, only to have the employees repudiate the efforts of their negotiators by voting rejection of the contract.

Each of these situations will generally move the bargaining process into impasse resolution procedures. Generally, these impasse proceedings will involve a third, presumably neutral, party to offer advice or binding decisions. Some boards operate in impasse proceedings set by statute; others follow these procedures because they are traditional; and still others will agree in the first negotiating session which impasse procedures will be used to settle unresolved issues.

Generally, the state of the art in impasse procedures used by school boards involves the sequential use of a set of procedures in which the neutral third party either advises or directs the parties toward resolution. The procedures (and usual sequence) are:

- Mediation.
- Fact-finding.
- Arbitration.

In addition to these traditional sequential steps, many boards are now engaging in procedures that are "cloned" from elements of the traditional steps. These are:

- Advisory arbitration.
- Mediation-arbitration (Med-arb).
- Final-offer arbitration.

The following is a general description of each of these procedures and how each works. It is advisable, however, for a board to supplement its reading with more definitive materials, which are available from private consultants, numerous state and federal agencies dealing with labor relations, state school boards associations, and the National School Boards Association. (NSBA, by the way, published in 1980-81 a highly useful report from its task force on binding interest arbitration. The report, "The Impact of Binding Interest Arbitration on Local Control of Public Education," should be "must" reading for any school board.)

Mediation

Mediation by a third party has long been an accepted practice for resolving differences: It is based upon the presumption that both parties are sincerely seeking agreement. The entry of the neutral third party in this procedure *does not* alter the two-party character of negotiations. The mediator's role is to secure an agreement between the parties, not to make a decision for them. In a pure sense, the mediator is a go-between who assists the parties in focusing on priorities, assessing goals, and realizing each other's limitations. The role is advisory, and any agreement reached between the parties is the responsibility of the parties.

Mediation usually can be invoked at anytime in negotiations when the proceedings bog down. After the parties have agreed to numerous items, but need resolution of a few sticking points, a mediator may be called in by the parties to get movement on problem items or a single issue. A mediator may also be asked to assist at the end of negotiations to avoid a formal break-off.

Fact-finding

If mediation is unsuccessful, the next step in resolving impasse is usually fact-finding (although some boards bypass this process and go directly to arbitration). Curiously, this process may not actually deal with "facts." It can take two major forms: fact-finding with recommendations or fact-finding without recommendations. In either form, the obvious implication is that the third party will be presented with the "facts" of impasse by both parties and will, of his own accord, pronounce which "facts" are relevant to resolving the dispute.

Fact-finding without recommendations limits the third party to locating and evaluating the factual basis for the impasse. Obviously, this process has a limited degree of probable success at resolving disputes.

Fact-finding with recommendations allows the third party to assess the facts, advise the parties of what should be done, and stress the need for accepting the recommendations. In that sense, the fact-finder becomes a latter-stage mediator.

Generally, the fact-finding procedure is reasonably formal—similar in structure to a judicial proceeding in which each party to the impasse states its case. In passing judgment, the fact-finder prepares a written summary of findings, which are presented to the parties in the form of non-binding recommendations.

Despite the possibility that either party could choose to ignore the recommendations, fact-finding has proven to be effective at providing a basis on which a final agreement can be hammered out between the two negotiating parties.

Generally, if a fact-finding report indicates that the union's demands are out of line, the union will settle promptly. The union must count heavily on public support to pressure the board into making concessions, just as the board will rely on the public to pressure the union. A procedure which includes the release of the fact-finder's report to the public at some point provides additional ammunition for the mediator/fact-finder to use in encouraging settlement.

"If a fact-finder supports the board's position, the union can't adopt the position that both the board and the fact-finder are unfair, since it would make the union look unreasonable."
—Superintendent, California

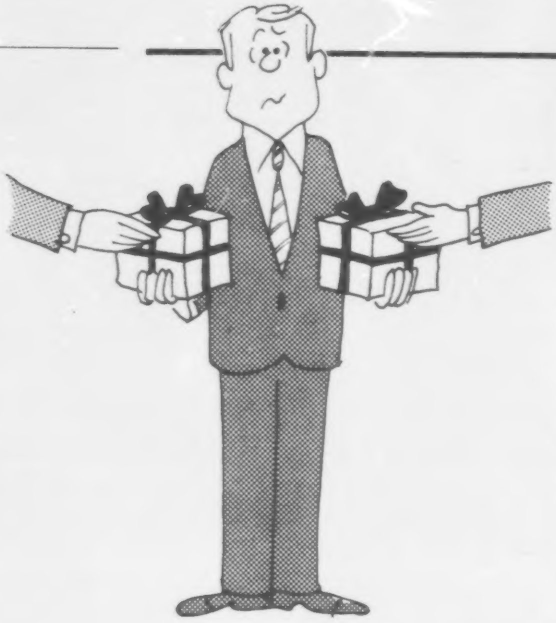
Arbitration

Arbitration is the submission of a dispute to a supposedly neutral third party who holds a hearing on the issues, and then renders a final decision which is binding on both parties. The procedure can apply to disputes of rights or interests.

Rights arbitration. Rights arbitration is commonly called grievance arbitration, and it generally applies to resolving issues in an existing contract. *Interest arbitration* is used to bring about a forced conclusion to the negotiation of a contract. In both forms, the arbitrator receives the positions of both sides and decides—by his own criteria—what the outcome will be.

It is binding interest arbitration that most boards find particularly unpalatable because of two inherent qualities in the process:

- Traditionally, the process has been favored by labor and has been



abused as a "second alternative" to a meaningful negotiation.

○ Moreover, since the decision is made by an outside party, the board must sacrifice control over the issues in dispute.

Some boards find binding arbitration so abhorrent that they would rather undergo a strike than arbitrate contract provisions. They note that, under binding arbitration, there is no middle ground. The arbitrator accepts each side of an argument and limits the decision to what one side seeks. As a result, public sector bargaining has seen the evolution of some specialized forms of arbitration: advisory arbitration, med-arb, and final-offer arbitration.

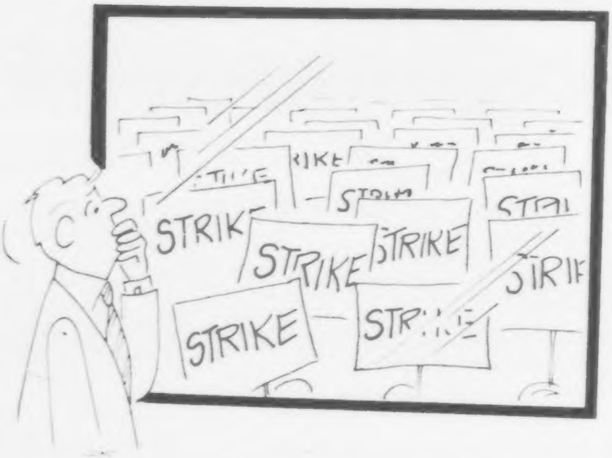
Advisory arbitration. Advisory arbitration is a procedure under which the arbitrator's decision is purely advisory. As a practical matter, the procedure is really nothing more than a modified form of fact-finding.

Med-arb. Med-arb is a procedure borrowing elements of mediation (med) and arbitration (arb). In this procedure, the parties choose the mediator-arbitrator and agree that all decisions reached by the parties through further negotiation, mediation, or arbitration under the mediator-arbitrator will become binding and final. As a practical matter, this procedure is an advanced form of mediation in which the third party has more power to force the parties toward a resolution of issues.

Final-offer arbitration. Final-offer arbitration requires that each party to a dispute submit to the arbitrator a total package of its final positions on all matters in dispute. The third party is then bound, without compromise between the two offers on a single-issue or full-package basis, to decide which position is more reasonable. He then makes a decision which is binding on both parties.

The principal weakness in this procedure for school boards is that it offers little more control over the final outcome than regular binding interest arbitration. The only important difference is that the board is gambling on a "winner-take-all" basis that its proposals will be found to be more reasonable than the union's proposals.

How to survive a strike



Two facts of life for school board members:

1. If you engage in collective bargaining, an employee strike is within the realm of reasonable possibility.
2. The presence of no-strike laws will not necessarily prevent employees from striking.

Advice to boards that bargain (and those that don't, but might): To survive a strike, have a plan to meet it.

A host of questions

The specter of striking employees is not a pretty thing to conjure, and along with it comes a host of questions any school board must address. Your board can't turn its face away from the possibility of a strike just because a strike is unattractive. Just as your board would

***"Before it faces a strike, a board should decide first if not arriving at a contract is worth it. You don't go through the horrendous consequences of a strike if the issue is only a few dollars in compensation."* —Board member, Florida**

not consider mounting a new program without a comprehensive plan, neither should it attempt to face a strike without thoughtful preparation.

You, your board, and its superintendent will need to know how valuable an injunction is, and how to get one. You will need to know if it's feasible to keep schools open and, if so, whether to do so on a full or abridged schedule. You will need to determine how to use administrative and non-union staff; how many substitute teachers the district can tap; what to do if the strike is of short, medium, or lengthy duration; and what school activities (regular and extracurricular) will be curtailed during a strike.

In the view of one board member, "Strike implies coercion, social trauma, and even violence." Added another, "There are few events which administrators and board members view with greater emotionalism than a strike."

To avoid being trapped by those emotions, your board should realize that a strike plan is as important as any policy it will adopt. A strike is a process in which no total victory will be won by either side—a fact that implies compromise. But, as one board member advises, "If you aren't willing to give up on the key points in negotiations, you have to be properly prepared to defend your views to the public in a strike."

Elements of a strike plan

There are numerous procedural considerations a good strike plan will incorporate. Obviously, the size and complexity of your district, its access to alternative sources of personnel, and the statutory limitations on recourses to strikes will dictate many board actions. Here, however, are a few basic items your district's plan might incorporate in order to be prepared whether the strike lasts five hours, five days, or longer:

***"What prevents a strike? Honesty, expertise, luck. What gets you through it? A good strike plan."* —Board member, Massachusetts**

Decide if the schools will remain open. There are two sides to this argument. Your board has an obligation to provide public education for a predetermined number of scholastic days per year, the students are obliged to attend, and the board has the responsibility to educate them. Obviously, if schools remain open, the strike will be less effective. On the other hand, there are security and potential liability considerations, as well as questions of how effectively the district's educational process can be without having its regular teachers in place. Your board must settle these issues and then determine whether schools will open.

Take necessary precautions for security. If the schools will remain open, the board should plan to protect students and others who will cross picket lines in order to attend. A key element of this planning should be to provide for regular communication between the campuses and the central administration facilities.

Bring in the attorneys. If the board benefits from an anti-strike law, implement what actions are indicated under the statutes. The board may be entitled to injunctive relief, although court orders, fines, and even sending union leaders to jail for contempt may not end the strike. In fact, such action could further solidify the union and polarize the parties.

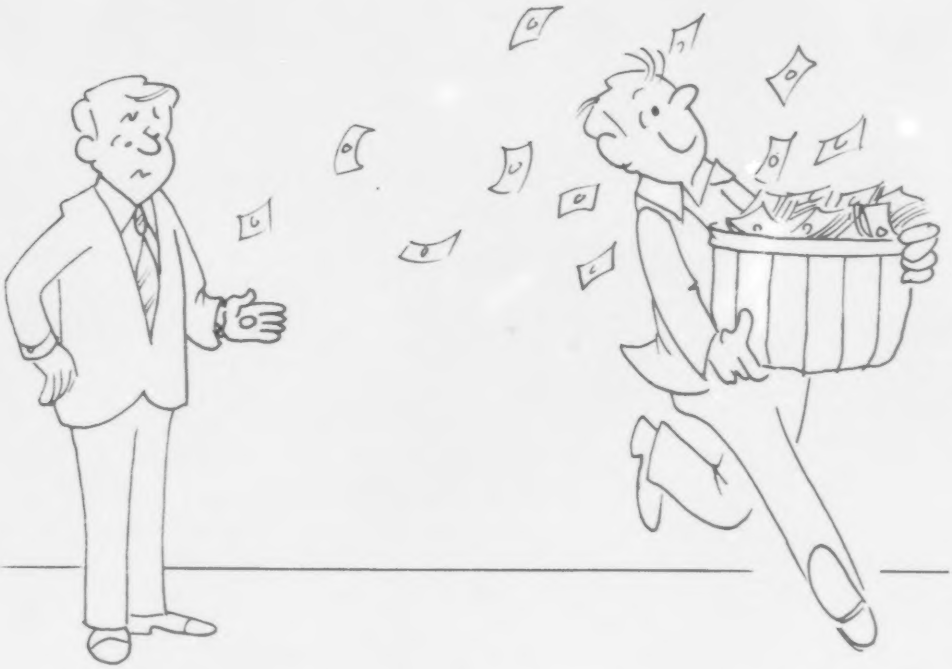
Examine the chain of command. If your district's deployment of personnel involves substitute teachers, supervisory personnel, or even parents performing some volunteer functions, ensure that a clear chain of command is developed on a school-by-school and system-wide basis. The board and administration cannot afford to get bogged down on operational details, so field supervision is important.

***"Good public relations can blunt the effects of the strike on your constituents."* —Board member, New Jersey**

Provide for settling the strike. Maintain open communication channels with striking employees. Take all necessary legal actions, but also be alert for possible overtures of settlement from the appropriate union officials.

Provide for resuming business after the strike. Set out provisions for communicating the terms of any strike resolution to all appropriate parties. Reach an agreement among the members of the board and all supervisory staff about which, if any, disciplinary actions will be taken; and strictly forbid *ad hoc* reprisals against striking employees. Your district should communicate with the press and public concerning the settlement and the schedule for resuming a full slate of any activities interrupted by the strike.

Provide time for assessing the plan. After the strike, examine your strike plan and make indicated refinements. Unless it has negotiated a life-time contract with all of the unions, your board may need the plan again in the future.



WHAT ABOUT MIDDLE MANAGERS WHO UNIONIZE?

One of the outcomes of collective bargaining for teachers and other school district employees is the phenomenon of middle-management administrators forming collective bargaining units.

Once a school board is faced with an administrative bargaining unit, there is little that can be done but approach the negotiations like any other. Thus, school boards should exercise "preventative medicine" in dealing with other bargaining units to avoid giving administrators the incentive to form their own unions or bargaining units.

Here are some key questions your board can ask:

Has the board been "pennywise, pound foolish?" The issue here is simple. Many boards have erred by negotiating salary and benefit increases with non-administrative employees, but not providing additional compensation for administrators. Advises one superintendent, "Your administrators are not likely to watch the board slice the loaf for the bargaining employees and offer what crumbs remain to the administration and other non-bargaining employees."

Has the board undercut administrative authority? The issue here is how effectively the board has negotiated (or *avoided* negotiating) management rights in its contracts with employees. All administrators feel there is a certain degree of authority inherent in their jobs, and the resentment or insecurity that results from seeing these powers negotiated away at the bargaining table can lead administrators to the bargaining table to get them back. (The fact that this process is almost always futile may not discourage them from trying.) One way to avoid negotiating away management prerogatives is to make sure that management (not the board) does the negotiating.

Is the school board ignoring the administration? The issue here is how often the board moves or appears to move against administrators. If it has trimmed back on programs to cut costs, without justifying the moves; if it has gone against personnel recommendations merely to assert its power; or if it makes decisions without consulting the administration; the board is hardly giving its management team a vote of confidence. The result could be unionization.

Is the board usurping administrative functions? Any school administration works off the chain of command. If your board is overstepping its bounds with its superintendent, then what is to keep other managers from assuming it will do the same to them? No principal, who is first responsible to the superintendent, wants to be told by a board member that he should fire a particular teacher or other employee. If he can't refer you to the superintendent this time, the next time he may refer you to the union.

If your board wants to avoid seeing its administrative staff turn to collective bargaining, it must treat them fairly, reinforce their importance to the district, and allow them to do their jobs competently, without interference.

A PERSONAL NOTE

After the strike, you are likely to feel the after-effects inherent in any emotional trauma. Expect them, and prepare yourself accordingly. Everyone has a technique for overcoming temporary setbacks. Here's what one superintendent had to say about the lingering aftermath of his district's strike:

"The greatest surprise to me was my psychological state after the strike was over. I went through a two-week period of coming down from an emotional high of coping with the strike, which manifested itself in a melancholy, almost depressive state of mind. Since that time, I have talked to superintendents who also went through strikes who had similar experiences after the strikes were settled."

A word about contract administration

Employee relations is a constant requirement of any school board as employer, and you and your colleagues will err if you believe that, once you have a signed contract, your collective bargaining duties have ended. In many respects, the implementation and administration of a new contract will be more significant to your board than the negotiations that led to the pact.

If the administrators and employees of your district fail consistently and uniformly to meet the requirements of the contract, the board is headed for serious labor trouble. Your entire administrative team—from the superintendent to the building principals—must understand the provisions of the new contract and scrupulously follow the procedures for administration and supervision provided in the contract and board policies.

Your board should take appropriate action to ensure that the superintendent provides all school managers with clear directives about the new contract and specific training for its administration. The administration must understand that the literal translation of the terms of the contract protects the rights of management.

Tools for good contract implementation include:

- ○ Management team briefings prior to implementation.
- ○ Periodic in-service training of administrators and supervisors.
- ○ Distribution of annotated copies of the agreement with complete explanations of and comments on relevant items prior to the briefing or training sessions.
- ○ Two-way communication to discuss problems of contract administration and to devise solutions to the problems.
- ○ A process for monitoring employee compliance with the contract terms. The fair and consistent administration of the contract is the key to avoiding grievances.

SUGGESTION

For more practical advice on collective bargaining, read Collective Bargaining: Problems and Solutions, *a Critical Issues report published in 1981 by AASA.*

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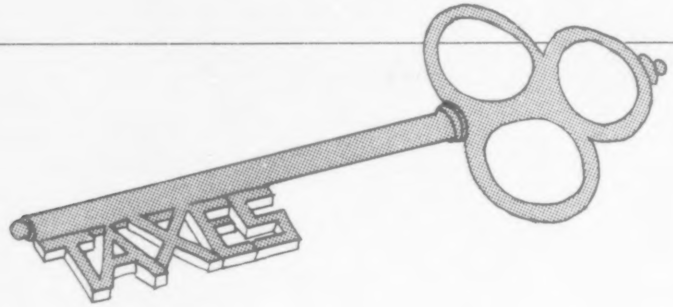
THE FUNDAMENTALS OF SCHOOL FINANCE



The public schools are public because they are paid for by public funds. This fact—so simple, so obvious, so fundamental—is often overlooked; its implications not well understood. Yet local, state, and national controversies erupt because of our frequent failure to grasp its stunning impact.

Look at the concept again: Public funds come from taxes. Taxes are levied on *all* the people and *all* must pay. Rich and poor, the God-fearing and the godless, single and aged citizens without children in school, and childless businesses—*all* must pay taxes. These dollars are eventually, in one form or another, channeled to support the schools. It is taxation which gives meaning to the word "public" and to the phrase, "the schools belong to all the people."

Taxation: the key to public ownership

Because the schools belong to all the people, no single segment of the community can dictate their programs or control their direction. The majority's might and power to impede a controversial school course, for example, will seldom be sustained in courts solely because the majority argues, "We pay most of the taxes." The minority's right is guaranteed because it pays *some* of the taxes. Private funds, gifts, and foundation grants are all beside the point when it comes to supporting public schools.

The 3 forms of taxation

The public schools are supported by funds from three sources: The major funding comes from local districts and state governments, while a smaller share is paid by the federal government. It has been customary to call it a "partnership of three." The third partner, the federal government, a relative latecomer to public school funding, has shown signs of an early departure. School systems which grew to depend on federal dollars in the '60s and '70s may have to face the last fifth of the century without subsidies from their rich uncle.

Local districts: their role

The states are legally responsible for maintaining a system of public education; but, for more than a century and a half, local communities have provided most of the financial support for public education. One hundred years ago, the states' share was small, but it has grown steadily. Today, however, in most states, the local community still carries a heavy portion of the burden of school support; and local property taxes usually generate that support.

The local property tax is the draft horse of school finance and, as such, has come under continuous criticism:

- ○ Home owners and property-holding businesses complain that they carry too heavy a burden for the support of schools.
- ○ School administrators complain that revenue from the property tax alone is not sufficient to pay for good schools.
- ○ Tax officials are under fire for inadequate or inequitable assessment of property and for laxity in collecting taxes.
- ○ Taxpayers charge that much too much property is exempt from taxation—that of religious, charitable, and educational institutions, for example.

In short, the property tax has not qualified as the perfect tax or even as a fair and reasonable tax. The most serious charge against the local property tax has been that it contributes to the unconstitutional inequality of education of the American people.

State governments: their role

While many districts are quite capable of providing adequate schools, others are relatively poor, and can afford only the most meager schooling for their children. State support in the form of foundation programs and equalization programs (many with complex formulas), all have the same purpose: to see to it that every child, regardless of the economic condition of the school district in which he lives, receives an adequate education.

States, then, are supposed to be the great equalizers of educational opportunity. They have tried hard, but the fact that they have not always succeeded is evidenced by continuing financial reform efforts and, more recently, lawsuits aimed at balancing state and local funding formulas.

Financial reform will continue to engage the best minds in the field for years to come. State legislatures (and, most likely, federal judges) will continue to seek ways to spread out the burden of school support, to guarantee all children some semblance of school equality, and to stimulate local districts to make even greater efforts for school support.

All the while, state support has grown. Nationally, the state is, at last, an equal partner with the local district in supporting schools. However, the differences among individual states are still sharp. In Arizona, for example, as the nation entered the 1980s, the state's contribution was 69.5 percent; in New Hampshire, it was 7.1 percent; in West Virginia, 62.7 percent; in Nebraska, 15.7 percent.

Where each state gets the money for school support varies, but most state funding is *not* derived from local property taxes. Instead, states rely on income and franchise taxes on individuals and businesses; sales taxes; and receipts from excise levies on gasoline, alcoholic beverages, and tobacco products.

Note: Your state school boards association will have very detailed information regarding the funding of education in your state.

Federal government's role

Since World War I, the federal government has gradually become a minor partner in the educational enterprise. Its contribution at the close of the '70s was less than 10 percent. While relatively small in volume, federal dollars have performed a variety of services for public education. Federal dollars have gone to public schools for the following purposes:

To develop courses and programs for which there was strong lobbying or in which Congress had a special interest. The vocational education acts and federal enactments to support metric education and school libraries are typical of such measures.

To bolster national defense. During the late '50s and '60s, Congress passed laws to improve instruction in science, math, foreign languages, and some technical skills which were said to be needed for national defense or to compete with the Soviet Union.

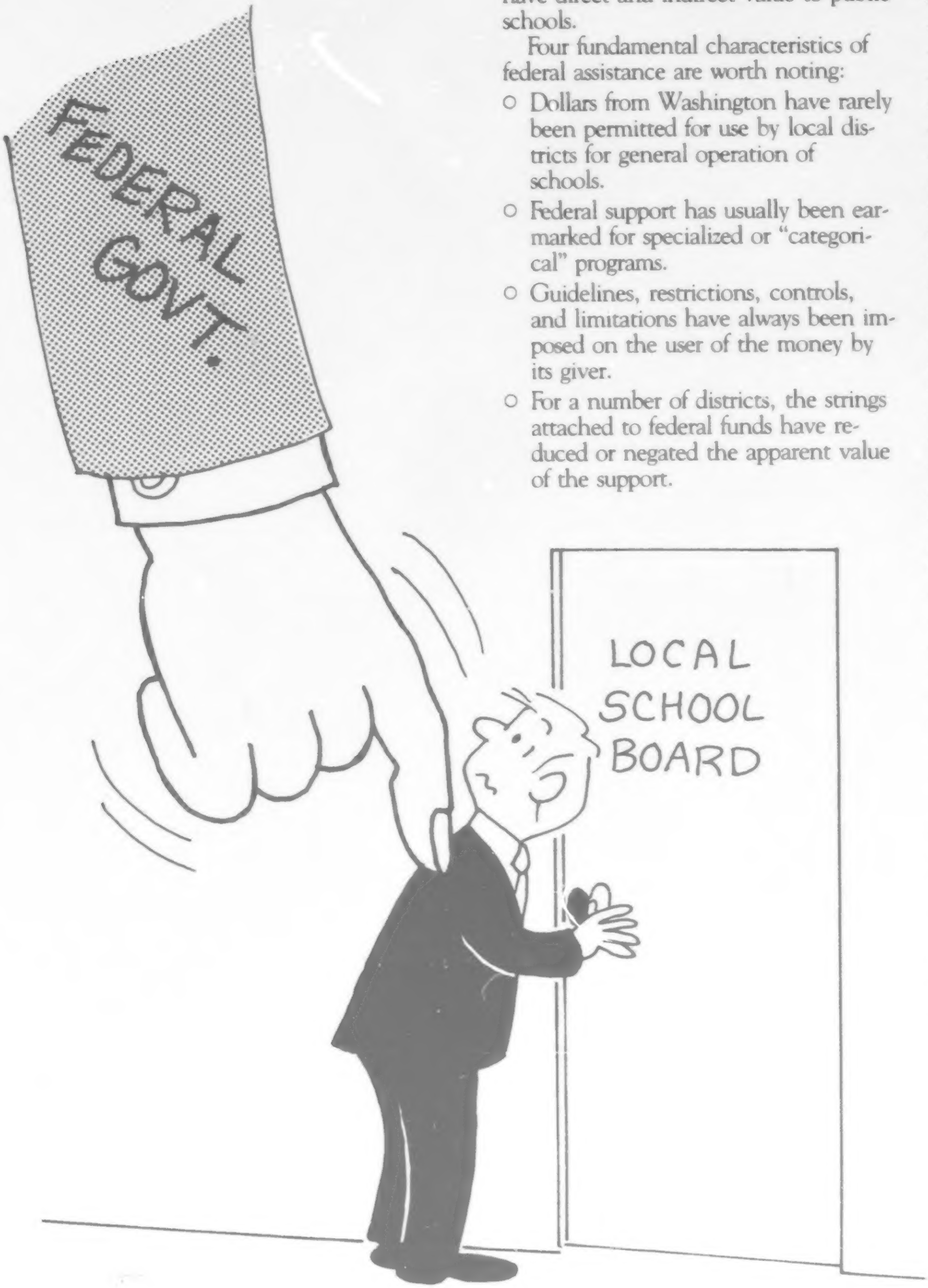
To fight poverty. School lunches, milk programs, student loans, and targeted grants are but a few examples of Congressional attempts to help children and families needing such help. The most famous Congressional program in the fight against poverty has been Title I (of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965), which provides grants to local school districts with large concentrations of children from poor families.

To bring about equal educational opportunity. In recent years, Congress has passed measures to promote desegregation, to ensure equal treatment of the sexes in schools, to aid the child who has not mastered the English language, and to give new and unprecedented attention to the handicapped child. Through these funding actions and their coincident regulations, Congress has sought to change tradition or to respond to the demands for relief for segments of the population.

Among the more than 100 federal assistance programs, there are also those seeking to promote new research and innovative practices in teaching and administration; to strengthen state departments of education; and to pay for conferences, bulletins, and demonstrations dealing with ideas that might have direct and indirect value to public schools.

Four fundamental characteristics of federal assistance are worth noting:

- ○ Dollars from Washington have rarely been permitted for use by local districts for general operation of schools.
- ○ Federal support has usually been earmarked for specialized or "categorical" programs.
- ○ Guidelines, restrictions, controls, and limitations have always been imposed on the user of the money by its giver.
- ○ For a number of districts, the strings attached to federal funds have reduced or negated the apparent value of the support.



WHAT ARE YOUR DISTRICT'S SOURCES OF REVENUE?

Completing this checklist may take a little effort on your part. You will probably need the help of your superintendent or business manager. Recall that a school district's major sources of revenue are local taxes, state aid, federal assistance and grants, and a group of miscellaneous revenues. Now look more closely at these sources and their yields in your district.

	Actual revenue for 19_/19_	Percentage of total
1. Local		
Property tax		
Sales tax		
Income tax		
Other local taxes		
(list)		
2. State		
Operating aid		
Building aid		
Transportation aid		
Special education aid		
Other state aid (list):		
3. Federal		
Aid to disadvantaged children		
Impact aid		
School lunch and other food programs		
Vocational education		
Grants for special projects		
4. Other revenues		
Interest on investments		
Income from property		
Rental of vacant school space		
Leasing and joint-leasing of school buildings		
Building use fees		
Fees from other school property		
Food service income		
Income from student fees		
Tuition from non-resident students		
Summer school fees		
Adult education fees		
Other student fees		
(list):		
Sale of publications/films/other district products		
Grants and gifts:		
From foundations		
From corporations		
From others (list):		
Funds raised by parents/citizens		

Note: No survey is completed by just collecting numbers and computing percentages. Analysis may reveal some "hidden" costs associated with certain revenue categories. For example, how much does your district *spend* to assess and collect local revenues? How much does the cost of a bond election reduce the actual proceed? Do the strings attached to certain federal or state grants actually *require* your board to allocate (and raise) additional funds?

The school budget

"The budget is a tool board members can use to apply philosophy, to change curriculum, and to influence management."
—Board member, Minnesota

Viewing the school budget

School board members look at the school district budget in numerous ways:

- ○ As an informal contract between the school board and the school administration.
- ○ As a public relations instrument. It tells the public the school story in dollars and cents.
- ○ As an organized plan, representing the financial picture of the school district. It is based on past performance, but it also can provide a tool for planning the educational future of the school district.
- ○ As an avenue through which a board can express its concern for instructional services and those services that support the instructional program.
- ○ As a mechanism for control. It tells the administration and the public that the board has a tight rein on every dollar that will be spent for education.
- ○ As a decision-making mechanism through which a school board can choose not only whether it will fix the schoolhouse roof and install a new security system; but also, more importantly, what shall be taught, how it shall be taught, and who will teach it.
- ○ As a statement of philosophy. When the board eliminates budgetary support for sex education, bolsters the guidance staff, or provides for library collections of modern books, it declares its values to the community.
- ○ As a political document. The budget is often a compromise of many views, values, and goals. It may represent a compromise between what the staff requests for instructional materials and what principals think they can really use; between what the administration wants to spend and what the business community thinks it should spend; between what a fiscally dependent board thinks it needs and what municipal financial officers declare it should accept.

The board's primary budgeting role

How your board views its budget will affect, to some degree, the budgeting role it plays. Before you and your colleagues can adopt a budget with confidence, however, you will need to understand it, review it, and make alterations as necessary.

"Everything a board wants to do affects the budget; and the board can use the budget to bring about desired changes. The budget is not a matter for an accountant."
—Board member, Iowa

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SCHOOL BUDGET

Before voting to adopt a budget, you will want to have a working knowledge of:

- The components of the budget—what percentages are derived from where.
- The procedures for setting the budget—who does what and when.
- The relationship between priority areas and expenditures.

The importance of knowing the right questions to ask about a budget can't be over stressed, as the comments of one board member illustrate: "When we pass our budget, we think it's great. When it gets to the voters, they tear it apart. Then I wonder: 'Why didn't we ask the kinds of questions about our budget that they ask?' "

Most board members concur that they don't have to know the details of the budget, but they have to know their own priorities. As one points out: "You have to ask whether certain things are in or out. You must question the effects of the budget on particular programs. If a cut is recommended, you need to ask what effect it will have on the students."

The budgeting process

"There are no profit-and-loss statements in the educational enterprise."
—Board member, Connecticut

When asked just how specific a board member's knowledge of the budget should be, most school leaders agree that it's more important to know the district's budgeting *process* than it is to know specifics.

Preparing an educational budget is not a precise process, nor do its steps correspond to those used in industry where precision in budgeting is frequently claimed.

The goals of a school system are sharply different from those of an industry or business. The "products" of a school system cannot be measured in kilowatts or items marketed. School systems seek to produce future citizens equipped with a fund of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to help them lead useful and productive lives.

When working on school budgets, you need to muster your patience and inner calm. Many budget decisions are within the realm and power of the board; many are *not*. State legislatures and state departments of education can have much to say about school budgeting. (Ask your superintendent to brief you on these, if they affect your district.)

In preparing an annual budget, your district may have to follow and use state-prescribed procedures, time schedules, forms, and accounting and auditing requirements. States place limitations on district expenditures, revenues, and indebtedness. If your superintendent says, "We can't do this. . . ." or, "We must do this," you either accept the inevitable or begin a fight to chan[illegible] [illegible] irements.

An[illegible] [illegible] for keeping your nerve [illegible] ing the budget proce[illegible] [illegible] ons are increasingly [illegible] ide school buildings and the board room. What is the mood of the [illegible] on expendi[illegible] dget is tied to the municipal government, what do the city fathers have in mind? Also, if applicable, how will the collective bargaining on teacher salaries come out? You may not know this until late in the year—and that item may represent the largest increase in the budget.

The process starts with a calendar

While budgeting is not a precise process, it should be an organized process. Therefore, your board should adopt a budget calendar.

In most instances, a budget calendar will cover an entire 12-month period. It should cover at least a 10-month period—from school opening week in August or September through the closing week in May or June.

The second fact about a budget calendar is that it will contain three categories of information:

- *Dates.* Precisely on which days will budget planning and preparation activities occur? When will reports and recommendations be due?
- *Functions.* Exactly what should happen on the dates specified?
- *Persons responsible.* Which members of the staff are responsible for the functions?

Your board may not wish to keep in touch with the details of preparation; but it should establish, with the superintendent, such crucial dates as:

- When the administration will present to the board summaries of staff requests for budgetary items.
- When a tentative budget will be completed and presented to the board.
- When the superintendent will make the first formal budget presentation to the board.
- When public hearings will be held.

"One of our biggest problems is that we budget first and then plan. This is very expensive; it should be reversed." —Board member, Oklahoma

- When the budget will be presented to municipal or state officials (where required).
- When the board will hold final discussion of the budget and adopt it.

The participants

With or without board involvement, the budget is in some stage of development almost every school day. Teachers make lists of materials and supplies for the coming year. Principals review these lists, adding and subtracting. Curriculum officials make plans for a new textbook series or for changes in laboratory, shop, or library facilities. Maintenance supervisors assess the wear and tear on school buses, gym floors, and heating equipment.

In the district business office, statisticians, clerks, and accountants analyze lists of actual and predicted student membership. They make immediate and long-range predictions of student enrollment. They produce computer print-outs of staff members and personnel data. They estimate revenues and check them against possible expenditures.

Your primary concern

Much of this budget methodology need not concern you. As a board member, your primary concern should be on what you, the policy maker, would like to see happen for the education of the students and the community. This calls for your active participation in the development of an educational plan and a facilities and materials plan.

Possibly, focusing on these comprehensive plans is too demanding at the early stages of budget development. Probably, what you and your board colleagues should be doing is making notes to yourselves, writing notes to the board chairman, and talking about and exploring such things as:

- Strengthening the guidance staff.
- Adding club sponsors to strengthen the extracurricular activities in the junior high schools.
- Approving the purchase of new readers for grades three and four.
- The need for an additional teacher for gifted students.
- The merits of having an advanced course in Spanish.

These items, possibly a dozen or more, may eventually become the ingredients of an educational plan.

Similarly, you should be thinking in broad policy terms about facilities and equipment. Don't worry about the need for more cafeteria trays or a new 80-gallon mixing bowl. Such items appear in budget requests without your concern. The board should exercise leadership in deciding whether:

- Cable TV should be installed for instructional programs.
- A new chemistry lab should be constructed in an inner city school.
- The in-school suspension area should be altered and made educationally attractive.

Gauging your success with budget planning

In the early stages of budget planning, don't try to attach price tags. Establish needs, goals, priorities, and alternatives.

As each member of your board contributes ideas about education and facilities, your superintendent will eventually come up with proposed educational and facilities plans, including costs, reasons for bypassing, reducing, or postponing some items, and indications of what appears to have the highest urgency.

Consider yourself a productive board member if even two or three of your personal priorities for the educational or facilities plans see the light in any one year.

"A budget without a plan is only half a document. Worse than that, it's a missed opportunity." —Board member, New Mexico

Pitfalls in budget adoption

In fulfilling your primary role regarding the school budget, you will want to avoid these major pitfalls in budget adoption:

Avoiding the budgetary process ("The administration is handling it okay. . . .") until the budget document is all but complete. Minor changes at an advanced stage are possible; however, major changes which involve goals, philosophy, or innovation will require valuable staff time. If you or anyone on your board insists on such changes at a late stage in budget development, you will have to get the majority of the board to support them. It might be too late.

Failure to get sufficient public participation in both the early and later stages of budget preparation. Find out what the public wants, needs, and will support—or will not support—before you set your budget priorities. Keep the public informed about budget development, and be sure to publicize the board's budget decisions.

Failure to ask for and receive from the administration clear explanations of every major part of the budget. Supporting documents should be clear and concise. If explanations are not clear, and the supporting documents are complex or confusing, insist on better ones.

Inability to identify in the budget items which address the future. Possibly such items have not been included. Possibly they are hidden or subsumed in items in various parts of the budget. Unless you can identify such information, you will be voting for a budget which may contribute little to the future improvement of schooling and the development of staff and educational resources.

Failure to specify whether the board is budgeting dollars or authorizing the acquisition of designated material and services. Illustrations:

- Your board places $150,000 in the budget and earmarks it for "teachers." Did you and your colleagues give the superintendent a free hand to spend the $150,000 the way he decides best as long as it is for teacher salaries? Or did you have in mind the employment of new teachers for specific subjects and departments? Suppose the superintendent hires teachers in areas specified by the board and does not spend the entire $150,000. Can he hire another teacher?
- Your board appropriates $50 per teacher for professional improvement trips. Does a principal have authority to let one teacher go on a trip costing $500?
- Your board budgets $7,000 for 10 typewriters. The administration gets a bid for the 10 typewriters which is under $7,000. May the administration buy a new calculator with the extra money, even though it is not on the equipment list?

Does your board want to control only broad categories of budget authority, or does it seek to specify how the money is spent? Failure to make this clear through policy creates pitfalls for the execution of the budget.

Inadequate consultation with municipal officials. Regardless of whether your district is fiscally dependent or independent, it is good to be in line with the community's estimates of its economic ability and the public's willingness to pay for all types of services, including education. The school budget cannot be isolated from other county, town, or city budgets—at least not for long.

Lack of policies that require procedures to control budget transfers, year-end transfers, year-end surpluses, and unanticipated revenue surplus or shortfall. Questions in all four categories are sure to come up as the year's spending proceeds. Before you vote approval of a budget, ask the superintendent to provide you with the procedures the administration will follow. Then ask: Are these procedures in line with state law and regulations? With written board policy?

Failure to provide for contingencies. "Expect the unexpected and be sure you have the money to take care of it," says a veteran board chairman. Your board should be ready to face boiler failures, the results of a deferred building maintenance program, court rulings requiring large payments, or unanticipated teacher master contract costs. The contingency account should depend partly on the total size of the budget and the administration's predictions of what the future might hold for the school system.

Monitoring, implementing, and auditing the budget

Once the school budget has been adopted, the board takes on an oversight responsibility. It monitors expenditures to ensure that the money is used for the goals the board has specified and is within the spirit and intent of the authorizations. Proper monitoring requires:

Periodic (monthly is best) review of financial reports. These should include a revenue report, appropriations report, cash report, a bill list (or report of expenditures), and a report on net worth. Names of these reports may vary from district to district, and so may the systems of financial presentations. However, every board should get the information these reports provide.

An understanding of the district's ongoing financial status. Regular financial status reports should answer the question, "How are we doing financially?" Answers should be reported monthly, the result of monthly balancing. Says a veteran school business official: "By balancing, we simply mean that the cash expended, as shown on the cash report, equals the cash expended on the appropriations report.

"Budget fund transfers? What are budget fund transfers?"

"The fact that the school yearbook and school rings are not purchased with board funds does not eliminate the need for board guidelines." —Board member, West Virginia

"The same should be said of net worth. We're dealing with public money. The board should see to it that the administration can account on a monthly basis for the net worth in all funds. This information, along with spending rates and spending projections, reduces the possibility of slashing programs in the middle or end of the year. Proper monitoring prevents actions which may have an adverse effect on educational programs."

Keeping an eye on school activity, athletic, and cafeteria accounts. These small accounts can cause big trouble. From experienced fiscal officers come these suggestions: The board should see to it that all cash for these accounts is deposited into a bank account immediately. The funds should be controlled centrally, not by individual schools. Above all, see to it that there exist clear and well understood policies and directives that control revenue and expenditures from these funds.

There may be occasions when the school activity or athletic accounts may need subsidies from the board. Such subsidies will represent board expenditures, which should be anticipated and controlled. That is one good reason for close monitoring.

Being wary of budget fund transfers. This is a big, potential troublemaker in the execution of a school budget. Consider these examples:

○ The superintendent reports that he has not spent all the money budgeted for textbooks and wants to use the unexpended amount for an air conditioner for the teachers' lounge.

○ A principal, unable to find aides for the kindergarten teachers as authorized by the board, wants to use the money for library aides.

○ It's been a year of severe snowstorms, and the snow removal fund is exhausted. Where will the money come from to clear the school grounds?

Budget transfers are a complex matter. They are governed by law in most states. They require policies that spell out the board's intent on transfers from fixed charges (heat, light, insurance, etc.) to other budget items, and its intent on transfers to and from nonfixed charges (textbooks, supplies, and equipment). The board should also decide whether it wants to act on budget transfers monthly, quarterly, or semiannually.

Being alert to the year-end condition of the budget. Your budget may be in good shape by the end of the school year, or it may be near shambles. The end of the fiscal year is a time to be leery of an undue number of budget transfer requests; of the condition of the budget line for contingencies; and of shortages in some major funds and surpluses in others.

Don't fall into the error of saying, "Well, it's the end of the year. It doesn't much matter what we do. . . ." What the board does to the budget *this* year (whether at the beginning, middle, or end)? will affect *next year's* budget.

VITAL STATISTICS ON BUDGET DECISIONS

In making budget decisions, you need statistics about the *people* the schools serve; about the *resources* of the district to support education; about the *staff and facilities* that make schooling possible; and about district *levels of operation* today, so that you will know what they should be—and might have to be—in the years ahead. Here are the types of statistics to ask for, along with some illustrations and questions districts might raise on the basis of statistical information.

1. **People schools serve**

Total population in district

Characteristics of the population

○ By age group

○ By ethnic and racial background

○ By type of family
    with children
    without children
    single-parent families

○ By income

○ Number of handicapped students and kinds of handicaps

Population trends in the district

○ Increasing

○ Decreasing

○ Change in socio-economic backgrounds

○ Change in ethnic character

School population

○ Total number of students enrolled

○ By elementary grades

○ By secondary grades

Projections for five to 10 years

○ By elementary grades

○ By secondary grades

Trends in private school enrollment

Minority student enrollment

○ By schools

○ By grades

Illustration 1: Statistics show an increase in the number of residents age 45 to 55. Should the board increase funds for adult education?

Illustration 2: Projections show a sharp decline in secondary school students in the next 10 years. Should the board eliminate funds for a new high school wing which has been scheduled for construction?

2. **Resources of the district**

Assessed valuation of taxable property

Total revenue from local sources

Total state aid

Federal aid

Revenue projections for three to five years

Projected economic changes

Illustration 3: New economic indicators point to a rise in local tax revenue due to the unexpected location of a large factory in the community. Should the board set up fiscal contingency plans for an eight percent increase in staff and for additional classrooms in the elementary schools?

3. **Staff and facilities**

Total number of teachers

○ By age

○ By tenure/nontenure

○ By salary distribution

○ By number of years experience

Administrative and supervisory staffs

○ By age/tenure/salary

○ By function

Total number of school buildings

○ By age

○ Physical condition

○ Scheduled closings, by years

○ Scheduled major repairs and renovations, by years

Inventories of equipment

Illustration 4: Statistics show two parallel trends: declining enrollments and a continuing rise in the age of teachers. Should the board set up a fund to encourage early retirement through bonuses and incentive plans?

Illustration 5: New school census facts reveal an unexpected rise in enrollment during the next four years. Must the board eliminate from the budget expected revenue from the sale and rental of buildings which had previously been scheduled for closing?

4. **Levels of operation**

Student-teacher ratios

○ By elementary grades

○ By secondary grades

Student-staff ratios

○ By elementary grades

○ By secondary grades

Class size

○ By elementary grades

○ By secondary grades

Core current expenditures

Expenditure per student in ADA
(Average Daily Attendance)

○ By elementary grades

○ By secondary grades

Expenditure per student

○ By operating expense

○ For capital outlay

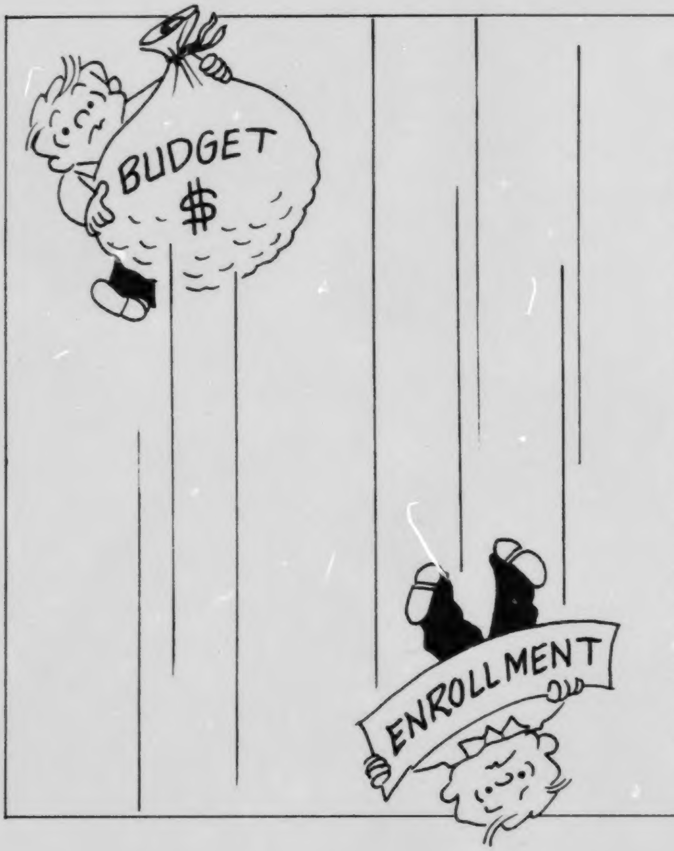
○ For interest on school debt

Illustration 6: School-staff ratios point to an excess of administrators and central office staff. Should the board ask the superintendent to report on possibilities of reductions-in-force and the amount of possible savings for the next budget?

WHERE DOES THE MONEY GO?

To get a handle on the school budget often isn't easy if the document runs on for scores of pages. To better see the financial picture of your district's operations, use this outline. It will be useful to you as you plunge into school budget discussions.

Where the Money Goes	*Per Pupil*	*Percentage of the Total*
School board expenses and development		
Administration		
Professional salaries		
Secretarial and clerical salaries		
All other expenditures		
Instruction		
Classroom teachers		
Other professionals		
Secretarial and clerical salaries		
Textbooks		
School library materials		
Audio-visual materials		
Teaching supplies		
Other instructional expenditures		
Staff development		
Food services		
Attendance services		
Health services		
Plant operation		
Plant maintenance		
Fixed charges		
Employee benefits		
Transportation		
Salaries and wages		
Insurance		
Current capital outlay		
Debt service		



WHY DOES THE BUDGET GO UP, EVEN WHEN ENROLLMENTS GO DOWN?

During this decade, there will be a continuing drop in enrollment in elementary and secondary public schools. With fewer pupils, would it not seem that school expenditures should drop correspondingly?

To the chagrin and bafflement of board members and taxpayers, it doesn't work out that way. Why? One simple answer is *inflation*. However, it is a bit more complex than that. Public schools also are operating with a number of fixed costs, most of which cannot be reduced substantially, even with smaller enrollments.

Here is the way one board of education explained this phenomenon to its patrons:

"Let's say a household has two adults, two children, and operating expenses of $10,000 per year. This includes mortgage, taxes, utility and phone bills, insurance, and other normal maintenance costs. It one child goes off to college or gets married, will household operating expenses go down by one-fourth? Not a chance! Even if a room is closed off, and operating expenses can be slightly decreased, most expenses will remain the same or be reduced far less than 25 percent.

"The same holds true for a school district: Though schools may be closed, the dollars needed to operate the remaining facilities will not be reduced by much—and may well rise because of inflation."

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT YOUR DISTRICT'S ACCOUNTING SYSTEM AND PROCEDURES?

On paper, if not in practice, school board members are responsible for seeing that their district—under the business administrator's direction—maintains adequate records and controls over state, federal, and local funds, as well as other school district finances. Accounting records and reports should reflect what is *actually* happening.

Here are some questions to ask to determine whether your district has adequate record-keeping and accounting procedures:

Does the district have an adequate system of internal accounting controls? An internal accounting control system ensures the proper use of funds by having built-in organizational checks on revenues and expenditures. The system will vary from district to district. Your board may want to get the advice of an experienced accountant to determine whether suitable controls are in effect.

Are the district's accounts audited? Regular audits should be conducted by state personnel, certified public accountants, or other qualified accountants, and reviewed by the board. This should be done even if not required by law in your state.

Is money allocated for a specific purpose actually spent for that purpose? If an expenditure is not included under the proper heading, it will be difficult to control spending or make valid comparisons with other districts.

Have provisions been made for areas that require special attention in the matching of revenues and related expenditures? School boards generally serve as trustees of special funds, including bond issue funds, school lunch program funds, and revenues from student activity funds. Many accountants feel that the balances, assets, and liabilities of these funds should be kept separate from the rest of the school operations. This is particularly important when some of the revenues are raised by special taxation or contributions.

PER-PUPIL COST: HOW DOES YOUR DISTRICT COMPARE?

How much are we spending to educate a student? That is a useful question in thinking about school finance. This concept is formally phrased as, "expenditure per student in average daily attendance."

What is that figure for your district today? Jot it down on the line below; as well as figures for prior years:

Expenditure per student:	**Year**	**Amount**
(Note: You may want to break down these rates into further components, such as secondary, elementary and kindergarten and pre-kindergarten.)	______	______
	______	______
	______	______

The latest national and state figures at the beginning of the decade ranged from less than $1,600 to almost $5,000 per pupil. For the nation as a whole, the expenditure per student averaged about $2,400.

Taxpayers' associations keep a keen eye on per-pupil expenditures within their state and local districts. Advocates for either higher or lower budgets make wide use of these figures. A per-pupil expenditure of your district that is substantially higher or lower than that of your neighboring districts may bring criticism of the board as either a "big spender" or "penny pincher."

Investing school funds

Many boards are authorized to transfer and invest surplus monies so that the earnings of these investments become a part of the school fund. Many business managers invest the cash balances of active funds which, though allocated for a specific use, temporarily are not needed.

School districts most often invest in certificates of deposit or savings accounts; or in short-term bonds, bills, or notes guaranteed by the federal or state government.

The laws regarding school investments vary from state to state. Some school districts are required by state law to invest money that is not needed immediately. If your board is covered by a mandatory investment law, or is permitted to invest funds, its business and fiscal agents too should become familiar with investment details including:

- How much money can be put in one bank.
- The collateral requirements for investment.
- The types of investments legally possible for the district.

A brief school board policy regarding the investment of school funds might look like this:

"Whenever there occurs a cash balance in any active fund which, although allocated to a specific use, is temporarily not needed, it is the policy of the board that that balance will be invested temporarily to the best advantage of the district in such securities as are permitted by law. The interest earned from such an investment will be credited to the fund from which it was invested."

Referenda strategies that work

Getting out the vote requires a personal commitment by each board member.

"If your board is not unified behind a referendum, you're going to have a hard time passing it." —Board member, New Jersey

"Without community support of the schools, there will be no support for a tax increase." —Public information officer, Iowa

When the time comes for your board to ask the public to approve a tax increase to match the general increase in school expenditures, or to pass a bond issue so the district can make some needed capital improvements—like building a new school or auditorium—it will be looking for some sure-fire formulas to bring victory at the polls. The advice will pour in:

- "Don't encourage too many people to vote, or you will lose the referendum."
- "Go after only the people that you know you can get."
- "You can count on the parents to help you win the election."
- "Television spots are sure to help you succeed."

Sorry, there are no formulas

Can you rely on this advice? There may be some truth in such slogans and catch-phrases, but there is also enough disparity with fact to defeat your proposals. You can't rely on what has worked before in your district. It may not work again. Also, a strategy that succeeded in a neighboring district may not be successful for yours.

Times, conditions, and voters' feelings change. Each referendum takes place in an atmosphere all its own. Its effect can rarely be predicted. What your board *can* do is study the mood and temper of the people—and not only just before the referendum—and then help devise strategies the board thinks will work. The best advice is to *expect the unexpected.*

What it will take to win

Setting the right public mood for a successful referendum doesn't happen overnight. People build their attitudes toward the schools over a long period.

Once your board has determined that there is a chance that a referendum will pass, here are the things your district must do to turn that possibility into a majority vote:

Plan, determine, and decide. Decide what is needed and how the funds will be spent. This is a first step in laying the basis for a successful referendum. The planning is best done in open board meetings with public involvement, although plenty of homework by the superintendent and staff will be

***"What you do during the years before the referendum will determine the outcome more than what you do the few weeks during the campaign."* —Board member, Connecticut**

necessary. Some boards assign the planning and determination task to citizen committees; others work closely with major community groups.

Consider, deliberate, and weigh. Determine when the voters should be asked to go to the polls (exact date) and when intensive campaign work should begin. Timing is important. When the board is looking for a referendum date, it should consider the state of the area's economy, current attitudes toward the schools, the credibility of the schools at the moment, the experiences and result of the last referendum, and any applicable state laws.

Inform all members of the community what the propositions are to be and why they are vital. Include teachers, administrators, support staff, and students when possible. (Students carry messages home!) Unless the school staff is convinced that the referendum must pass, the board won't be able to convince the community.

***"Don't assume that the public can't read a balance sheet. Last year, our board sponsored a referendum, but we weren't in the hole enough to have credibility. The public started a petition against the increase."* —Board member, Michigan**

Set up your campaign machinery. Ask the superintendent to submit to the board:

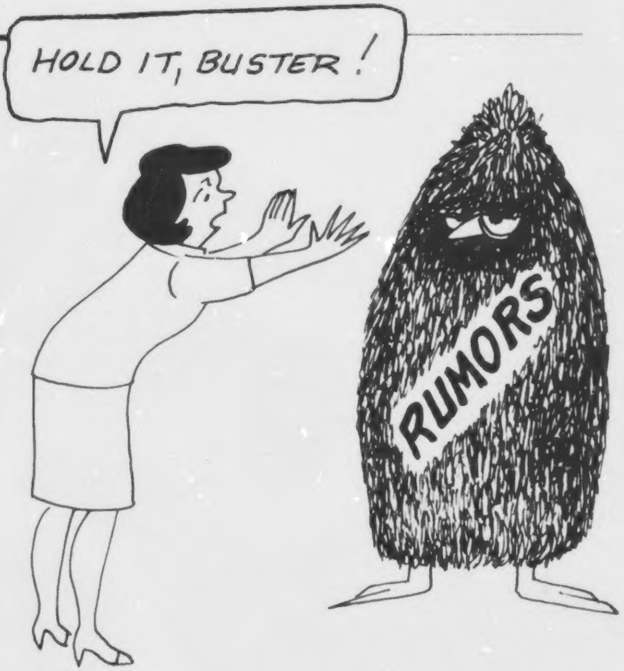
- ○ A budget of campaign expenses and the proposed source of the money.
- ○ A calendar of upcoming events.
- ○ An organization chart of campaign units, coordinators, and workers.
- ○ The facts to be presented to the public (If these can be summed up on a 3 x 5 card, you've got a winning tool!).
- ○ The themes or slogans to be used.

See that informational materials are prepared and plans are made for their distribution. These might include posters, flyers, special bulletins to the home, reminders to vote, and materials to use in door-to-door visits.

No board can expect taxpayers to vote on what may lead to a tax increase if they don't know what they are being asked to finance. All communication, written or verbal, should stress the types of things taxpayers will want to know:

- ○ School district enrollment: what it is currently, what it will be in the future, and how it compares with neighboring districts.
- ○ What the funds being authorized will provide.
- ○ Why district voters are being asked to vote.
- ○ How the needs of the district were determined.
- ○ How passage of the referendum will affect their taxes.
- ○ What the present school taxes are.
- ○ How and when bonds will be sold.
- ○ What interest rate the district will be charged.
- ○ How long the resultant funds will last.

***"Don't hide the truth from the public. Have long-range plans so that you don't hit the public too often, and cultivate the media."* —Board member, California**



You've got to be armed with facts and be prepared to squelch any rumors.

Monitor the campaign strategy. The board will leave most of the execution of campaign tactics to the staff (including, possibly, paid consultants and public relations specialists), but it should monitor proceedings by asking:

- ○ Have previous campaigns been analyzed?
- ○ Have individuals been assigned timelines and responsibilities to carry out the different aspects of the referendum plan?
- ○ Are parents, nonparents, and citizens from a variety of sectors helping in the campaign?
- ○ Is the information given the public true, straightforward, clear, simple?
- ○ Is the campaign rhetoric under control? Is it reasonable and believable?
- ○ Are campaign materials student-oriented?
- ○ Are campaign costs being held within specified limits?
- ○ Has the district consulted legal counsel to be sure the ballot is properly worded?

***"The media can be your worst enemy or your best friend. Get them to report the facts and work consistently with them."* —Board member, Alabama**

***"You should maintain genuine communication with the public so that voters feel you are interested in their opinions, not just their money. Genuine communication is year-long."* —Board member, Florida**

"Don't assume you can count on parents for support. You will have to work to get out the vote." —Superintendent, Ohio

Learning from others

The campaign strategies used by other districts might or might not work for your district. However, it is helpful to know what has worked in other districts when trying to choose strategies for your district. The following are strategies for success related by one of the members of each of the victorious boards:

Mini-case in referendum victory, No. 1

(A county district; K-12 enrollment: 16,000)

"We failed in 12 attempts to pass bond issues. Year after year, the mood of the district's voters verged on revenge, 'Let's give the public schools a big, swift kick. . . .' But we needed new tax funds if the district was to survive.

"We began planning for the latest campaign more than a year before announcing the referendum date. We set up a district-wide chain of lay committees, and reactivated committees in each school. Working with these citizen groups, the board authorized (1) a community education program to bring adults, especially those without school-age children, into the schools; (2) an after-school child care program; and (3) a county-wide summer recreational program.

"The superintendent held a series of public meetings at which administrators, board members, and citizens discussed the district's educational future. Thousands of voters were brought face to face with such questions as: 'Do you want to see our school plant in good physical condition? Do you approve what we have done for adults? Do you want to see your childrens' school improved?' (Many of our board members later felt that the referendum was won at these public meetings.)

"Try to find out how the public will feel about a proposal before it is formally submitted to them. A measure that stirs up controversy or organized opposition often fails." —Board member, Georgia

"At the same time the date for the voting was chosen, the board gave the signal for new and more intensive work with the community. We organized groups among senior citizens, public housing residents, homeowners' associations, and members of civic and social service groups. Each group was asked to commit itself to 'getting out the vote,' especially those citizens who were likely to vote Yes. The leaders of the groups were asked to head off rumors and to help disseminate information about the needs of the schools.

"Volunteers helped. At each of the public meetings, board representatives asked for the names, addresses, and phone numbers of people who would like to help in the campaign. Two weeks before the vote, the PTA set up a telephone bank from which many of the volunteers called parents to come out to vote Yes.

"Throughout the campaign, we avoided undifferentiated appeals to voters, such as radio and TV spots. Only during the last week of the campaign did the superintendent place professionally prepared, general ads in the newspapers. When the votes were counted, the school propositions won by a two-to-one margin."

Mini-case in referendum victory, No. 2

(A suburban district; K-12 enrollment: 4,800)

"Our school tax rate had not been increased in five years. We took pride in our frugal management and we told the voters so in our first effort to get an increase through a referendum. But it didn't work. For one thing, we fell for that tired principle, 'Keep a low profile, don't stir up the voters, and don't encourage too many people to vote.' Only 25 percent of the registered voters came to the polls, but they licked us.

"On the next try, we changed strategies. Demographic studies of our district showed that we needed a coalition of parents, 'empty-nesters,' and senior citizens if we were to get approval of a tax rate increase. The district forged a citizen campaign force which canvassed neighborhoods, made telephone calls and, on election day, helped bring many voters to the polls.

"The messages that these campaign workers brought to the people had been worked out at a series of board meetings. The first message was that, if the referendum failed, the board would be forced to close one elementary school; eliminate art from the curriculum; reduce the number of music teachers; drop physical education in the elementary schools; eliminate foreign languages in the junior high school; and reduce athletic, band, orchestra, and other extracurricular programs. The board actually voted, officially, that these cuts and reductions would become effective immediately should the referendum fail.

"The second message of the board was that each voter needed to weigh these educational losses against an average tax increase of $60 to $70 per property owner. It was clear and simple. The tax rate increase won by a comfortable margin."

Mini-case in referendum victory, No. 3

(A semi-rural district; K-12 enrollment: 6,000)

"Of 24 referendum elections in 13 years, we have won 19 and only lost 5. How do we achieve our victories?

"We believe that passing elections is a year-round activity. Therefore, all through the year, district newsletters go from administrators to parents, telling what the schools are doing. Each school principal supplements these newsletters with parent conferences, school meetings, and other efforts which involve fathers and mothers.

"Our strategy calls for appointment of an election advisory committee. Its first job is to set goals and decide on tactics to be used during the campaign. From experience, we know that each school must become the base for the dissemination of facts about the issue. The school building principal identifies a coordinator to serve during the campaign and, quite often, the coordinators are members of the election advisory committee.

"Block committees are active during the campaign. The block chairmen often serve as hosts at coffee get-togethers at which the proposed levy is discussed. A day or two before the voting, the block committee members seek to reach voters by telephone to remind them to vote.

"Board members are placed on a list of potential speakers and are invited to meetings of voters to provide explanations and justifications of the proposed levy. We feel that the personal appearance of board members before the voters is a strong factor in building a positive voter attitude."

"An election only lasts one day. Your appeal should be louder and more visible on that day than any other."
—Board member, Oregon

Keep trying

As evidenced by the experiences of these districts, the passing of a referendum is like playing a football game: You have to have the right setting and spirit, a certain amount of talent, willingness to try, a lot of effort, and some luck. And if you lose, you need the fortitude to try, try again.

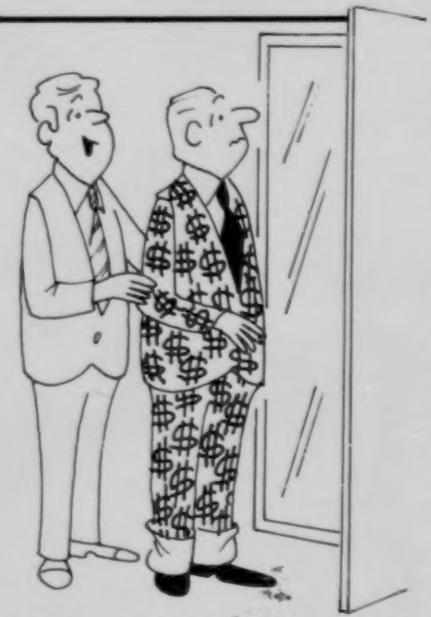
Cutting school costs

"The biggest problem our district has is money. The budget is larger, but buys less."
—Board member, North Carolina

The literature on cost cutting and money saving in schools grows and grows. Articles, pamphlets, brochures, and books appear with frequency. When someone publishes a book with 101 ways to save money, another author is challenged to come out with a book suggesting 301 ways.

The dollar-conscious board of education will advise the superintendent to go over his list of money-saving techniques as often as possible, and the attentive administrator will do so. He will not wait for authorization or board approval to try to make the school dollar do more in heating and lighting the school plant, in maintenance and operation, in transportation, and in food and other support services.

Both boards and school administrators should think long and hard before seeking savings in programs which affect the education of students or in which the community has a special interest. Saving money is not the first priority for all taxpayers. Many parents would rather pay more than see less in school offerings.



"Among school board members, this pattern is popular during this inflationary period."

"Even with the rise in prices, we have maintained the level of two years ago. Turning off lights, lowering thermostats, and installing storm windows require effort and sometimes an initial investment; but overall, the benefits that accrue can be great."
—Board member, Louisiana

6 major cost cutters

Here are six suggestions for savings which require decisions by the board:

*1. **Establish, through policy, annual (or semiannual) surveys of facilities, maintenance, and operations seeking to eliminate waste.*** One basic ingredient of such a policy: Surveys should be conducted by state department personnel or specialists from other sources, even when a reasonable fee is required. A second basic: Surveys should be planned and executed with the cooperation of the superintendent and staff. The superintendent should have the right to accept or reject proposals for savings related to routine operations.

*2. **Establish and nurture the principle of sharing.*** Ask the administration to develop a long-range plan having as its object the sharing of staff, facilities, instructional materials, and course offerings with other school districts. Sharing is also possible in data processing, purchasing, and in-service education. In fact, examples of sharing are sprouting in all parts of the country, in all types and sizes of districts. Your administration will have no problem compiling a list of possibilities.

*3. **Explore voluntary early retirement of teachers.*** Check with your state department of education. If there are no obstacles, ask the superintendent to outline a plan for the early retirement of teachers. The basis of such a plan is an offer by the board to higher-salaried teachers of a bonus if they elect early retirement.

"We have realized substantial savings from our early retirement program."
—Superintendent, Florida

*4. **Take a hard look at complex and expensive vocational education offerings.*** This area, long considered a necessary part of American education, must be studied with care. Are vocational courses preparing youths for jobs and the labor market? "Most high school vocational education is training youth for dead-end jobs or no jobs at all," says one educational consultant. Many employers agree, but many citizens do not. Vocational education has a place of high regard and respect in Congress, state legislatures, and especially among vocational educators.

There is a growing conviction that public education can best support trade and technical training in post-secondary schools such as community colleges; rather than in elementary and secondary schools. Be ready for a controversy if you plan to take on this suggestion.

*5. **Waive the four-year, full-time requirement for graduation.*** There is no need for a student to attend high school for a full four years if he is qualified to take his diploma earlier. The waiver is a boon for the student and his career plans, and that makes the waiver attractive educationally. It is also a money-saver for the district. One Maryland district instituted such a policy over 10 years ago, and reports a 1-year savings of several hundred thousand dollars.

*6. **Ask for a thorough review of your school sports program.*** This has been a sacred cow in many school districts, and its care and feeding has taken many dollars. A review should include such questions as:

- ○ How many teams?
- ○ How many coaches?
- ○ How many trips outside the district?
- ○ How many tournaments?
- ○ Are we buying too much equipment?
- ○ Are we getting the best in equipment for the least money?
- ○ What *hidden* expenses should be brought to light?
- ○ Are we serving the educational needs of the students through sports, *or* the interests of alumni, boosters, and others?
- ○ Is our purchasing agent making economical, unbiased decisions?

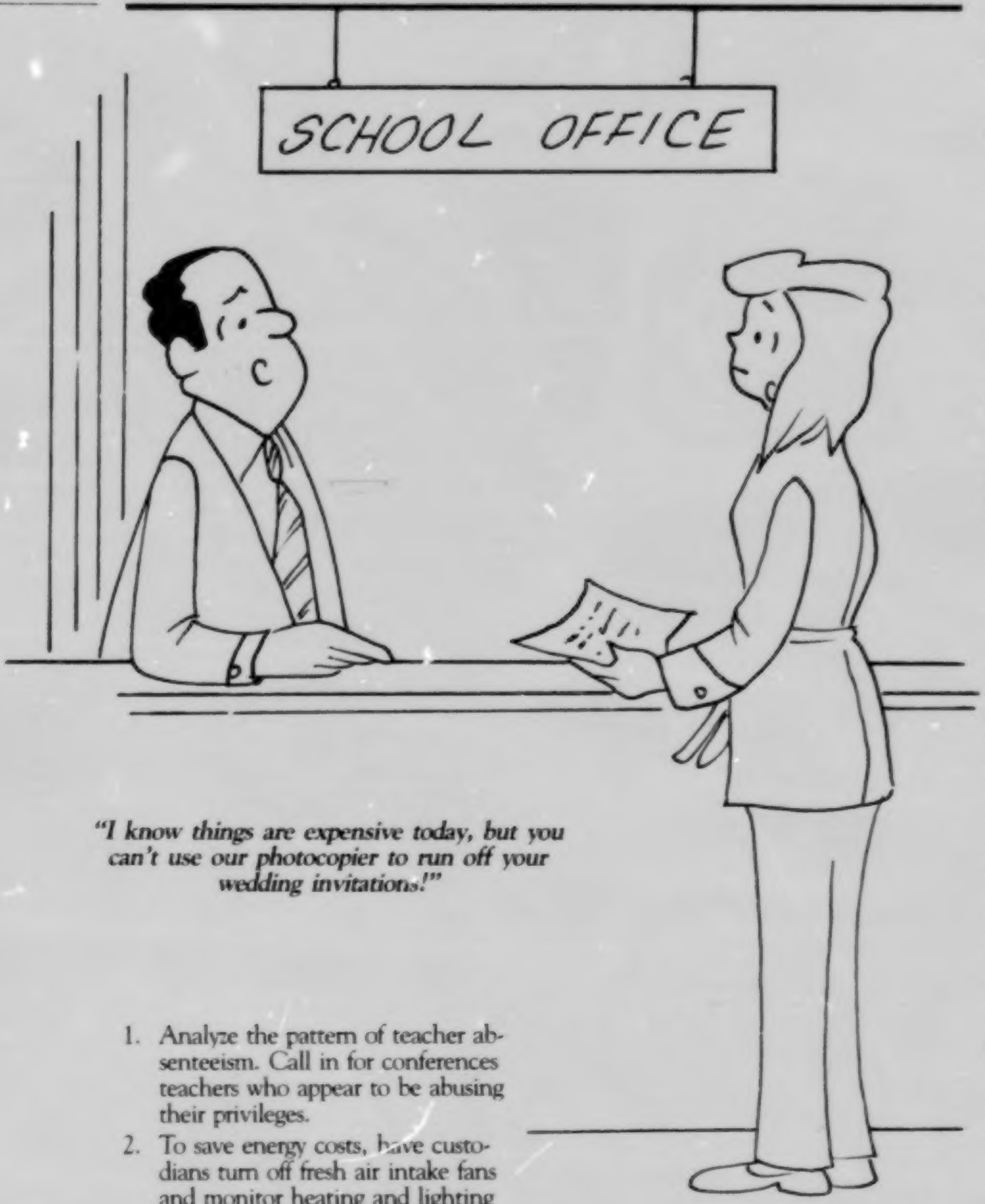
SUGGESTION

Don't regard school closures and consolidations primarily as money-saving techniques. They are more than that. They are actions of paramount importance affecting the entire district's educational policy and organization.

Never close a school only on the basis that "it will save us money." It may do so—but may also create community turmoil, shortchange the schooling of boys and girls, and bring on demands for changes in board membership.

12 other ways to save

From the experience of districts in all parts of the country have come these prescriptions for saving dollars. The list of operational cost cutters could be extended into hundreds of items. These suggestions should be pursued by the school administration.



"I know things are expensive today, but you can't use our photocopier to run off your wedding invitations!"

1. Analyze the pattern of teacher absenteeism. Call in for conferences teachers who appear to be abusing their privileges.
2. To save energy costs, have custodians turn off fresh air intake fans and monitor heating and lighting in unused or partially used school space.
3. Utilize more intensive competitive bidding for items used in food service programs.
4. Establish a tight control and scheduling system for use of the school computer.
5. Set up new controls for use of office photocopiers.
6. Examine your mail room operations and reconsider all former ways of using the postal service. Use private shipping firms, if advisable.
7. Hire journeymen for jobs previously done by high-priced craftsmen.
8. Train all custodians to make minor repairs.
9. Install new security and check-out procedures in school libraries.
10. Set up a schedule for hiring temporary clerical help.
11. Buy all possible items in larger lots. Investigate cooperative or joint purchasing procedures with other school districts.
12. Examine the use of paraprofessionals: Where and how can they be used to save teacher time and salaries?

13

CURRICULUM: THE NO. 1 PROGRAM

"So much for curriculum development this school year. I hear you asking yourself, 'What about 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, and 1987?'!"

The instructional program touches every student, parent, teacher, administrator, and school board member. It is the school program that is—or should be—second to no other. It is the first and most important reason for having schools. It is the schools' primary contribution to a well-educated citizenry—people capable of contributing to all aspects of society—locally, nationally, and globally. It is influenced by many groups, including school boards, administrators, teachers, textbook companies, developers of standardized tests, and lobbying groups.

The degree of involvement school boards have had in their districts' instructional programs has been varied, and the verdict is still out regarding what, exactly, the board's role in curriculum should be. Initially, when the first school boards were established in 1647, school boards controlled the schools. They managed everything, including the curriculum. Then, beginning in 1851, superintendents were employed to tend to the day-to-day operations of the schools and, since then, no clear distinction has been made as to what is the board's role in the instructional program. Through the years, some boards have wiped their hands of any involvement; and those that wanted to get involved were not sure of how to go about it.

School board members and school administrators who participated in a 1979 NSBA-sponsored task force on the elementary and secondary curriculum identified numerous obstacles that keep boards from shaping the instructional program. Among them were state and federal mandates and judicial orders that predetermine the curriculum for schools, budget restrictions, a lack of a plan or procedure through which the board can address curriculum issues, board members who are uninformed

"The biggest concern of any school district and, consequently, the most controversial and political, centers on the question, 'What is to be taught in the schools?'" —Superintendent, Texas

about curriculum issues and strategies, a constantly changing board, or a board that is divided regarding curriculum goals.

The task force also found that some boards did not get involved in the curriculum when they met resistance from their administration or staff, and many have not found the time to deal with the curriculum. The changing role of the family has increased the scope of a school board's responsibilities, and other issues such as drug or alcohol abuse and student discipline have taken precedence over the curriculum.

The basics of a board's role

Despite such obstacles, boards can and do substantially affect the curriculum by:

Making a commitment to the curriculum. Boards that take their curriculum determination role seriously proclaim through written policy that curriculum is important and that, as a board, they are concerned with its planning, execution, and evaluation. Also, boards committed to supporting a quality curriculum express their commitment by placing problems of curriculum development on the agenda of board meetings as frequently as possible. Many boards devote entire meetings to the questions of what is being taught and how it is being taught. Board members committed to curriculum think instruction, talk programs, and boost teaching and learning.

"Many software packages are only 'expensive paper.' They may not teach a child math in a way much different from flashcards, but may still be worth big bucks because the students will be 'up' for something different. This advantage, of course, will dissipate as computers become more commonplace." —Teacher, Maryland

Allocating adequate resources. A board's commitment to curriculum development must be accompanied by the adoption of a budget that provides adequate sums for in-service education, supervision, curriculum development, and evaluation. The budget should ensure a supply of modern instructional materials in print, film, and other media, including the products of modern technology. Enough money should be allocated to equip school libraries with modern reference materials. Funds should be reserved for the release of teachers to work on curricular and instructional tasks.

Keeping an eye (and ear) on curriculum. A board cannot make curriculum decisions in a vacuum. It must ask for frequent reports from the administration on:

○ Overall and general aspects of the education program.
○ Specific subject matter areas.

Questions in the first category might include: What are we doing to ensure continuity between grade levels? Is there a plan for evaluating and revising major aspects of the curriculum?

Questions in the second category: What reading programs exist in K-3? Has there been any improvement in writing skills in the middle grades? Has the recent purchase of micro-computers for the tenth grade been educationally beneficial?

A board must ask and keep asking for analyses of test scores in reading, language arts, and mathematics.

"Curriculum is what happens in the classroom and is much more important than test scores or anything else." —Board member, North Dakota

Working out the basics

As a member of a board committed to providing quality instruction, you will need to look at your board's role in curriculum development in more detail. Your school board should:

Develop curriculum and instructional policy. A basic policy statement on curriculum can be short or long; general or specific. Whatever the form, this policy is your board's proclamation of instructional beliefs, expectations, and priorities.

More than one statement may be needed to cover your board's ideas on curriculum. Policy statements might deal with a score of topics, including:

○ Curriculum adoption.
○ Curriculum guides.
○ Citizenship education.
○ Advanced placement.
○ Adult education.
○ Class size.
○ Graduation requirements.
○ Individualized instruction.
○ Guidance and counseling.
○ Programs for the gifted and talented.
○ Homework.
○ Testing programs.
○ Competency education.

Shape and reshape goals for instruction. Depending on the educational climate, boards make the "three Rs" their first goal; or they stress life competency or career education. Some boards make the development of skills their first goal; others stress student ability to think and solve problems.

Goals are not set in concrete. As conditions change in the community or the nation, your goals may change. You

"In-service education is a mainstay of a good curriculum and should be assigned enough dollars to cover more than a day of 'professional growth.'"
—Board member, Connecticut

"I'm seeing a lot of this among school board members lately. It's called 'back-to-basics blahs'."

"We had developed five-year plans in all the management areas—food service, transportation, and all the others—and we looked at each other one night and said, 'Where is our five-year plan for curriculum?' We didn't have any, so we had our administration get to work on one fast."
—Board member, Missouri

and your colleagues may need to reshape your specific goals for elementary grades, for the middle school, and for the senior high school. *Example:* You may need to shift attention from providing high school mini-courses and electives to an emphasis on a core program. You may wish to stress the importance of introducing foreign languages in the lower grades and programs for the gifted and talented. But always, your goals should be developed in cooperation with the administration, faculty, and the public.

Provide for curriculum leadership. This might mean a board committee devoted to curriculum and instruction, or a superintendent who believes in effective instruction as the first goal of a school system. Some superintendents propose employing curriculum coordinators and subject matter supervisors, while others plan to enable building principals to act as instructional leaders.

Support the curriculum with dollars. What your board values will be reflected in its budget. Board allocations for curriculum specialists or supervisors in specific subjects, textbooks, and related instructional materials, guidance and counseling, extra-class activities, remedial courses, and summer school are some indication of instructional goals and priorities.

A curriculum-oriented budget will contain adequate funds for in-service education. Many districts try to set aside funds for research and curriculum development, and for consultants.

As you and your board think broadly of the curriculum and its function, you might see the need to provide increased funding for school libraries, classroom collections of books and reference works, field trips, and teacher aides.

Keep the curriculum in balance. Some districts become athletics powerhouses; others are dominated by music boosters. Some districts stress competency testing; others seek to lead in teaching foreign languages to elementary students.

Most school board members want a curriculum that will serve many types of students, provide for many interests, and meet a variety of needs. Students need both the basics and enrichment courses. Some students may need alternative programs and schools; all need guidance and counseling.

"Our curriculum can't be changed without going through a study commission of administrators, staff, and community people. Their research results in an administrative recommendation to the board, which we usually adopt because they do excellent work. It slows down the process, but curriculum changes are well received and everybody understands them."
—Board member, Massachusetts

"The superintendent has the information about the curriculum and it is his or her professional responsibility to share this information with and explain it to the board. The board in turn serves as an ambassador of the instructional program to the people in the community."
—Executive director, NSBA

Reading is important, but so are speaking, listening, and writing. For many boards, this means seeking balance in the curriculum and in instructional matters by listening to the advocates of the humanities and of fine arts with the same ear they give to the advocates of mathematics, science, and other "basics."

Judge the innovations. New types of courses, new methods in instruction, and new teaching devices are constantly being touted. Advocates of innovation have pushed or cajoled many a school district into accepting programs and offerings which were virtually guaranteed to revolutionize teaching and learning.

Some of the innovations have left valuable legacies—new insights into the teaching of math, science, and language arts; and such useful practices as individualized instruction. It is equally true, however, that many innovations have been of little worth and some may have been harmful.

When proponents of instructional innovation appear to promote their ideas, the board should listen, ask questions, get recommendations, and try to serve as an independent and unbiased jury. Claims that new instructional ideas and curriculum changes have been "validated" by research should not overly impress the board. The main question is whether the proposals are in harmony with the board's goals and will promote the education of students, and whether the costs are reasonable.

Keep the teaching staff learning. It is variously called in-service education, professional growth, or staff renewal. Each term contains a clue to what a district's teachers—veterans as well as beginners—need. They need continuous help in understanding today's child; in maintaining safe and efficient classrooms—without undue disciplinary problems; and in keeping abreast of both subject matter and methodology.

Such help can come through planned, year-round seminars, workshops, and lectures provided by the district. It can also come through faculty rooms or library teacher centers which are well stocked with professional books and periodicals. It can come from providing time for teachers to attend conferences, visit neighboring classrooms to observe new procedures, and through sabbaticals. All cost money. The payoff is, or should be, improved education for children and youth.

DEPARTMENT
OF
STUDENT TEACHING

"Jason, 're-emphasizing basic skills' is not the same as 'jamming a little math and spelling down their throats'!"

ONE BOARD MEMBER'S ADVICE

What's a board member to do about school curriculum? The chairman of a board in South Carolina explains:

"There are two things a board member should do: Think instruction and think involvement.

"What I mean by thinking instruction is that everything we do at the board table should put instruction first. When we set goals, we should direct our district efforts toward improving student achievement.

"As for involvement, I mean we should draw in the teachers and the parents. Teachers should be involved in planning their own in-service education. Parents should be involved in serving through school or site advisory committees. Parents also need to know why in-service training for faculty is important. They need to know that the occasional day when the teachers work and students stay home is not just used for long faculty meetings, revising lesson plans, grading papers, or putting up new bulletin boards."

SUGGESTION

For more information about how boards influence the curriculum, read The School Board and the Instructional Program, *a research report published in 1981 by the National School Boards Association. Also, ask your state school boards association what materials or services it has created to assist boards in fulfilling their curriculum responsibilities.*

Developing curriculum programs and policies

SCHOOL
DISTRICT

"Our new sex education program has brought some unusual parental response."

"Don't make the common mistake of saying: 'I'm a layman. What do I know about these intellectual matters? I'll make decisions on finance and operation. Let them make curricular decisions.' When it comes to curriculum, them must be us."
—Board member, Connecticut

Your district's instructional program can be built around a curriculum which is anything from a structure of dry facts and disorganized bits of knowledge to a dynamic plan for educational growth. It might seem that most board decisions on curriculum would emphasize improvements and enhancements, all aimed at reaching the optimal program of instruction based on the ideal curriculum. Unfortunately, many of the decisions facing a board in its quest of these objectives are steeped in controversy.

Some of the controversy is political; some the result of academic wrangling among professional educators.

Items of controversy include: Are we teaching patriotism? Can thinking be taught? Does sex education belong in junior high? Is grammar needed? Do we need to teach penmanship? Shall history be taught as a series of dates and events, or as a reflection of the political, social, and economic forces at work in the world? How do we teach children to acquire reading skills and help them get meaning from the printed page? Do we teach both the creation and evolution theories of the origins of man?

Almost every subject taught in our schools from art to zoology is enveloped in debate and discussion as to what specifics shall be taught within that subject, and how each shall be taught. Leaving some of the more esoteric problems to practitioners, there are still dozens of curriculum programs, policies, and issues in which school board members become involved.

There are several major curriculum topics which require school board consideration. As you go down the following list, and as you review it from time to time, check to see whether your school board has policies to cover the topic; whether you, personally, need more information on the topic; and whether it would be advisable to have specialists make periodic reports to the board on them.

Program/Policy/Issue	*Yes, we have board policies covering this topic.*	*I think I need more information on this topic.*	*I will move to have a specialist respond to the board on this topic.*
1. *Basic and fundamental skills:* The question here is not whether to teach reading, writing, mathematics, and science, but how can we teach them better without neglecting other necessary aspects of education? What *are* the basics in our community?			
2. *Competency:* Most parents and educators want to equip students with skills and concepts to help them through life. The question is: What is needed for *a high quality of life?* Art? Music? Athletics? Great literature?			
3. *Remedial offerings*: How much time and effort should we devote to remedial courses? Why the need for them, anyway? Can we teach so that remedial work—which is expensive—will be less necessary?			
4. *Thinking or storing knowledge?* Some school leaders believe that the development of ability to think and solve problems is the first aim of education. Others believe that all the schools can do is fill the student's mind with facts. Are we educating or training our students?			
5. *Alternative education:* If a substantial number of students do not perform well in traditional subject matter, do we offer them a different track of courses? If they do not respond well to a traditional style of teaching, do we change our instructional methods? Is this wise? Are alternative offerings effective? Are they cost efficient?			
6. *Values:* Is the real business of the curriculum character development and the teaching of human relations, human rights, and tolerance and understanding? How should it be done? Should it be done at all?			
7. *Core vs. electives: What is the right balance?* There are those who believe that all students should be required to work through a fixed prescription of courses which contain the "core" of what students will need to qualify as being educated. Others believe students should have the right to select a substantial number of courses of their choice. What is the right balance?			
8. *Counseling*: Many board members believe that counseling is an "extra." Others argue that guidance and counseling are a necessary and vital part of the educational program.			
9. *Extra-class activities*: How educational are they? Are they worth investment of school dollars? Which programs of extra-class activities contribute to the development of student talents?			
10. *The arts: Are they frills or basics?* Music, painting, dance, drama, poetry, sculpture, crafts—how firm is their place in the curriculum, and how firm should it be?			
11. *Mechanization of instruction*: There are those who claim that much of the information we teach students can be taught through tapes, film strips, motion pictures, cable TV, and other electronic devices, such as computer teaching devices. Is instruction by electronics and machines possible, desirable, and practical?			
12. *Individually guided instruction*: Some curricular experts argue that "mass" instruction—one teacher teaching 25 students the same thing at the same time—is a waste of time and energy. Their reason: Each student learns what he wants at his own pace. The teacher can, at best, only guide a learner. Some districts have extensive programs of individually guided instruction. Should yours?			

WAYS TO INFLUENCE THE CURRICULUM

Curriculum issues in your district always lead in one direction—the point at which you and your board must decide whether to approve and accept changes and additions in school offerings, ask for modifications in proposals, or reject them.

Prior to that point of decision, you and your board have many tasks if you are to influence the curriculum of your schools. Here is an 11-point checklist:

1. Ask the superintendent for frequent and periodic reports on what's going on with respect to the curriculum. "What are we doing in reading?" "What's being taught in elementary science?" "Is the math program satisfactory?" Such questions should bring to board meetings reports from department heads, teachers, and chairmen of curriculum task forces.
2. Encourage the establishment of curriculum revision committees and study groups. Someone should always be looking into some phase of the curriculum, both during the regular school year and during summer weeks. Support such study groups with necessary resources—funds, space, and teacher time.
3. Give classroom teachers a large and significant role in curriculum revision programs. Administrators and curriculum experts should be helpers, not dogmatists.
4. Respect specialists when they come before the board to argue for curriculum change or innovation. Don't, however, be overwhelmed by their technical jargon. Be skeptical and ask questions.
5. Be courteous and attentive to pressure group representatives. At the same time, be wary and seek out their motivations. Do they have the educational interests of all or most children at heart?
6. When the board initiates a curriculum project of some importance, encourage the involvement of parents and students.
7. When the administration and faculty propose major curriculum changes, don't rush to rubber stamp their proposals. Use public information media to tell the community members what is being proposed and how it is expected to affect students, and solicit their opinions.
8. Schedule ample time at board meetings for consideration of ideas. Don't crowd a curriculum proposal into an agenda of urgent business matters. Devote special meetings or public hearings to the project.
9. Listen, weigh advantages and disadvantages, and seek compromises with the educational welfare of students in mind.
10. When it comes to curriculum changes, "Be not the first by whom the new are tried, nor yet the last to lay the old aside." (Alexander Pope never imagined his advice would have direct application to curriculum matters.)
11. After the board makes its decisions about curriculum changes or the introduction of new content and new emphasis in subject matter, be sure the superintendent follows through with directives for in-service education. Only then will curriculum improvement take place.

Helpful advice

Here are a few tips for not losing your perspective when the curriculum battle is raging in one arena or another:

- ○ Curriculum revision can take place subject by subject and level by level. Thus, a district can focus its attention on the revision of language arts, on fifth-grade social studies, or on twelfth-grade chemistry. However, throughout the process of concentrating on individual content areas, there also must be concern about articulation; that is, fitting all the pieces together into a pattern that will serve the student as he moves from subject to subject and from grade to grade.
- ○ Merely changing the textbook of a course, or changing a series of textbooks for a grade, is *not* curriculum revision. Poor is the curriculum, poor the program, and poor—educationally—is the district which bases its instruction solely on the textbook.
- ○ If your school board becomes involved in some aspects of curriculum revision, you can expect strong partisanship favoring or opposing almost any recommendation offered for discussion. Board leadership and statesmanlike attitudes on the part of the board members are crucial when your district plunges into curriculum revision.

Providing instructional materials

INSTRUCTIONAL
MATERIALS
KIT

"Most textbooks are accurate, cover vast amounts of information, and are interesting and useful. Unfortunately, we do have textbooks that are repositories of dry facts, biased or slanted, and written more for the academician than for the young."
—Board member, South Carolina

Instructional materials is an umbrella term. It covers textbooks and much, much more, including dictionaries, atlases, anthologies, encyclopedias, pamphlets, learning kits, current events publications, and periodicals. Add to those films, film strips, tapes, records, videotapes, photographs, and even objects of art, and you enter the real wide world of instructional material. To some board members, it is bewildering.

In that world, the textbook stands supreme. It is the chief instrument of instruction in American schools. There are basal texts, supplementary texts, single texts, texts in a series, and texts for students of different learning ability—from the slow learner to the gifted student.

The selection of instructional materials from the bewildering array of products on the market is a task for teachers, administrators, and curriculum specialists. Some boards actually approve new books, but a great many fulfill this role through the adoption of policy governing textbook selection.

A potentially explosive task

Whether it is based on board policy or results from direct board action, the adoption of a text can cause a community uproar which focuses on the school board. Front-page news is made in community after community as school systems adopt or reject instructional materials in sex education, history, literature, social studies, and the contributions of America's varied nationalities.

A dual role

Your board's role in providing instructional material has two aspects:

○ Setting up guidelines for the selection and adoption of instructional materials.

○ Providing the funds to purchase the materials.

Since guidelines will be drawn from your state textbook laws, ask your superintendent to brief you on these requirements. You have to live with them.

Policy tips

Most boards have wide latitude within the framework of state laws. A policy can be brief or detailed; restrictive or permissive. Here are some concepts school boards often include in their policy on instructional materials:

○ Teachers and students should be supplied with up-to-date, educationally valid materials.

○ Materials should be consistent with the district's educational philosophy and instructional goals.

○ Each student should have access to an adequate supply of instructional materials.

○ Materials should serve the needs and interests of a multi-ethnic student enrollment.

○ A wide range of media, from print to electronics, should be used when possible and appropriate.

○ Instructional materials should be under continuous review and assessment.

○ Teachers should have a major role in recommending the selection of materials.

○ The views of administrators, parents, and students should be given serious consideration in the selection process.

○ The superintendent should be responsible for setting up and monitoring selection procedures.

"The textbook is still the king of the instructional media."
—Teacher, Ohio

Poor is the educational program that depends solely on the textbook.

The selection process

How new books and materials get into classrooms and libraries, and how old ones are eliminated, is a process which must be of concern to your board. A sound, clear, and comprehensive board policy on instructional materials provides the setting for that process; but a board must look beyond the policy into the way it is carried out.

The selection process used to be simple. A teacher would decide to introduce a new textbook or abandon an old one, and that was that. Over the years, textbook selection has evolved into a more involved procedure involving committees, criteria, and centralized procurement.

The selection committee

A common practice in most school districts is to entrust selection of materials to a committee, with the charge to make recommendations to the superintendent, and eventually to the board.

A selection committee may be concerned with tasks of varying range: One might be asked to find the best new textbooks in physics or chemistry. Another might be given the task of identifying the best materials for the instruction of reading, math, and social studies for specific elementary grades.

A board will want to stay out of the way of the workings of the selection committee, although in many instances individual board members are invited to serve. Until the recommendation of the selection committee comes to the board officially, it is best to be content with asking three questions about the committee and how it works:

Is the selection committee made up mostly of teachers? It should be, because the worker who uses the tools should have the right to choose them. However, it is prudent also to include administrators, parents, and students on a committee which will recommend major changes in instructional material adoption and use.

Is the committee working in an atmosphere of freedom? Is it working without pressures from vested interests, sales forces, or administrative dictation? Only an unpressured selection committee can choose materials which will meet the purposes of instruction.

Has the committee been briefed on the changing nature of students' needs? New concepts in learning? The board's instructional goals? The budgetary limitations for instructional materials? Administrators often devote several orientation sessions to keep committee members in tune with the educational goals of the district and its budget.

Criteria for adopting materials

When the superintendent submits the selection committee's report to the board, the board should also receive information on at least the following items:

Authorship of materials. Are the creators of the textbooks and other instructional items authorities in their fields and respected for their scholarship and approach to learning and teaching procedures?

Recency. Is the content up-to-date and does it include the latest factual findings or current ideas?

Objectivity. Is the material contained in the textbook and instructional items free of bias and prejudice? Are facts, trends, and concepts presented in a fair and even-handed manner?

Suitability. Are the instructional materials appropriate for the type of students who will use them? Will they serve the needs and interests of the majority of students in your district?

How to approach the budget

At a budget planning session, when the textbook or instructional materials' account comes up for action, pay attention. Your board's decision on this item will affect teaching and learning in your district for more than a year—possibly for as many as three to five years.

First thing to ask: What are the proposed expenditures designed to cover? Textbooks only? Or does the budget item cover a multitude of things, including library books, audio-visual equipment, instructional hardware, and even supplies such as paper and chalk? Ask that the administration define its terms and avoid categories which are too broad or vague.

Next thing to ask: How was the recommended figure for instructional materials derived? Is it based on an inventory of materials on hand, how long materials have been in use, their physical condition, and how soon some of them will have to be replenished or replaced?

Most board members know that they can't buy textbooks the same way they buy custodial supplies. As one said, "You are dealing here with educational goals, instructional methods, quality of teaching, and the outcomes of learning…everything the schools are really about."

The purchase of instructional materials involves judgment about education as well as finance. More questions to ask the administration:

- What, in general, is the current condition of instructional materials used by students and teachers?
- What are some copyright and publishing dates of materials in use? Is the most recent date a reprint date or was the book revised and updated?
- What new programs are being contemplated for this year and the next few years that will require new materials?
- What have been the budget allocations for each of the last three to four years?
- What major budget requests are planned for the next few years?
- Have the budget outlays for materials kept up with inflation?
- Are teachers getting in-service help on the best use of textbooks and other types of instructional aids?

TIPS FOR TACKLING TWO TOUGH ISSUES IN TEXTBOOK SELECTION

In making up your mind about instructional materials, you will also need to explore two major points: (1) how well the materials meet the needs of minority groups and (2) how adequately they foster a nonsexist attitude about the roles of men and women in society.

To find out, ask the textbook selection committee whether it can give you satisfactory answers to the items on the following checklist. If there are shades of uncertainty in the replies ("Well, yes and no. . . ."), you will have to decide whether the hedging is serious or minor before you cast your vote.

Materials for a multi-ethnic enrollment

	Definitely Yes	On the borderline	Definitely No
In general, do the materials recognize the worth and value of differences in racial, religious, cultural, and social backgrounds?	☐	☐	☐
Is the language in the materials free of aspersions and innuendo offensive to any minority group?	☐	☐	☐
Are the materials free of prejudice or bias, witting or unwitting, toward any minority group?	☐	☐	☐
Do they steer clear of stereotyped descriptions of and representations about any group?	☐	☐	☐
Do the materials recognize that America's people take pride in their diversity of origins, beliefs, and roles in society?	☐	☐	☐
Do the materials stress adequately the positive contributions that minority groups have made, and are making, to our lives?	☐	☐	☐
Do photographs and other illustrations used in the materials present a balanced view of the life and contributions of our nation's multi-ethnic groups?	☐	☐	☐
Has the selection committee provided adequately for bilingual materials where necessary?	☐	☐	☐

Materials for a nonsexist society

Nearly all the questions above provide tips for assessing instructional materials which are in tune with today's attitude toward the roles of girls and women. No textual materials which cling to the notions that the major contributions to civilization have been made by men only; that women have played, and should continue to play, an auxiliary role in business and in the community; and that the roles of women must be confined or limited to traditional types of work have a place in today's classrooms.

What you should know about testing

"Mr. Perkins' test requires a major overhaul of the established performance objectives, diagnostic preassessment inventories, multi-dimensional presentation strategies and, most particularly, terminal assessment instrumentation. I got a D!"

"Questions are the take-off points for a new level of teaching and learning. Put questions on paper, and you have a test. The results of the test should have the same purpose as the teacher's query: to start a new round of teaching and learning." —Board member, Connecticut

Have you ever asked yourself, "Why do we test in school?" If you have thought about it, you have probably come up with several answers.

Some tests, called *norm-referenced tests,* are used to show how well students perform when compared with other students around the nation. Other tests, called *criterion-referenced tests,* show how well students perform against a standard. (That is, how well students know the material in the test.)

Some tests are used to decide who will earn course credit, and some determine who will earn a diploma. Tests are used to decide class standing and to settle who will be admitted to college. We even use test results to decide who will get certain job offers and who will be remediated.

One of the most common uses of the test, whether we call it a quiz or an exam, is diagnostic. Tests that are given to find out what a student knows and what he does not know so that his individual learning program can be prescribed are called, to use the common jargon, *diagnostic-prescriptive tests.*

Kinds of tests

It's pretty clear that our schools use testing for a great many things. It's also clear that there are a great many different kinds of tests. Those that are classified according to what is measured include aptitude tests, personality tests, I.Q. tests, achievement tests, and the list goes on. Classified by type, there are standardized norm-referenced tests and criterion-referenced tests. Criterion-referenced tests may or may not be standardized.

None of these tests is good or bad, but misuse of them can cause enormous problems. So it's important to learn what each test is designed to do and then be sure that your board policy requires that each be used properly.

Intelligence Quotient. Those old I.Q. tests really reveal very little about students, and are only useful when used with a lot of other data. The I.Q. test purports to show one's relative mental capacity. This capacity is expressed by a number which you get by dividing your mental age by your chronological age and multiplying by 100.

If your mental age is 15 (as determined by the test) and your chronological age is 15, then your I.Q. is 100. If your mental age is 20 when you are 15 years old, then 15 into 20 is 1.33 and your I.Q. is 133.

The big caution here is to remember that the test can only test so much. There are many areas, such as creativity, which are not necessarily tested by the I.Q. tests. These tests are still widely used, but are no longer the sole criterion for making judgments about mental ability.

Achievement testing. This is an area of growing dispute. There are two basic kinds of achievement tests. They are called the norm-referenced tests (NRT) and the criterion-referenced tests (CRT).

One thing to understand about these two test methods is that they can both be *standardized tests.* Not everyone, though, agrees with that. In fact, some school leaders use the term *norm-referenced* synonymously with *standardized.* They don't think of criterion-referenced tests as standardized at all. Standardization, however, is not the key issue that decides whether or not a test is an NRT or an CRT.

"Good teachers use tests to move learning toward new levels. This point-of-view about tests can be profitably incorporated into board policy, and can be made the topic for in-service education where teachers lack this understanding." —Board member, Utah

Decide for yourself

Norm-referenced tests have been used for years. They are usually designed by testing labs and go under such familiar names as the "Iowa Test of Basic Skills," the "Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills," the "Stanford Achievement Test," or the "Metropolitan Achievement Test."

These tests are given to thousands of students across the country every year. They typically have many questions: some easy, some average, and some hard. Everyone is not expected to get all of the questions right. The test is then interpreted by looking at the relative scores of all those who took the test. The person who answered the most questions correctly will be at the top of the heap, no matter how many questions were left unanswered.

The testing publisher establishes *norms* based on a representative sample of students from across the nation. Picture a line drawn horizontally across the page. That's the middle score. This score is not the same as an average, but many think of it that way. The middle score or *median* is simply the point at which half the students scored higher and half lower.

The norm-referenced test is often used to compare the students in one school district against the rest of the nation. It is also used to compare one district against another. What one hears is, "This year, our district scored above the national average." Or more accurately, "This year, our third-grade students scored above the national norm in reading and math."

The median is only one norm that is often used for comparison. Every score for the standardization sample is converted into some type of norm score.

You may hear, "This year, our children in the third grade scored at the 53rd *percentile* in reading." So now you've heard a new term: *percentile*. Percentiles are the most common norm score used. The norm line is at the 50th percentile. Anything below 50 is below the national norm. Anything above 50 is above the norm. A district which scores at the 80th percentile really has something to brag about.

Norms

100th	percentile	
75th	percentile	
50th	percentile	Median
25th	percentile	
1st	percentile	

Criterion-referenced tests (CRT) are usually much shorter tests. They are designed to find out if the student understands a process, possesses a skill, or commands a body of knowledge. CRT's are not normally used to judge a student against another student. Scores are measured against criterion of performance set on a body of knowledge.

For example, the criterion-referenced test will tell if a student understands how to measure in the metric system, or if the student knows when the Civil War was fought. Many of the state laws requiring basic skills instruction lean on criterion-referenced tests to decide what students are learning. Some of the tests for graduation are CRT's. Some state laws provide that no one can receive a diploma until he has shown certain knowledge and skills.

So what's the difference between NRT and CRT? If you compare the score of one student against the others who took the test, that's *norm-*

referencing. If you compare the score of one student against a body of knowledge, that's *criterion-referencing.*

Now just to confuse you a little further, think about this: In many cases, you can use a test designed as an NRT to find out what a student knows. That is, you make a criterion-referenced interpretation of a norm-referenced test score. You do this by looking closely at all the questions the student answered. If there was a question on the Civil War and the student got the date right, then you know something about him in relation to that body of knowledge.

In some cases, it is even possible to do the opposite and make a norm-referenced interpretation of a criterion-referenced test. If enough people took the test, you can select a particular norm, such as the 50th percentile, and arrange the scores either above or below that norm.

The criterion-referenced test is more often used in the classroom and is designed by the teacher to find out what a student knows. One type of CRT is the pop quiz. It tells the teacher which students need more help in a certain area and which are ready to move on.

Pitfalls of standardized tests

Standardized tests are criticized for many reasons, but the most legitimate complaints come not from the test but from the *misuse of test results.*

First, there is the complaint that requiring a passing score on a CRT before graduation leads to "teaching to the test." If this means "teaching the test" so that the teacher shares the questions and answers with the students, then it is indeed unfortunate. If it means, however, that the teachers make sure that their students are instructed in the body of knowledge for which they will be tested, then it is a step forward. "Teaching to the test" is good, while "teaching the test" is not.

Second, the NRT is often prepared far from the district in which it is used. It is possible that the test asks questions about things which your school district does not teach. Normally, though, the NRT has so many questions that a few such questions would not badly skew the results.

A more serious problem is faced by a school which gives a test before the students have learned a particular skill. If children learn how to alphabetize in the fifth month of the fourth grade and the test is given in the third month, the scores will not look so good.

A third charge is that children may have a low score and become labeled as failures or low achievers. This label can haunt children for the rest of their lives. Again, it is not the test that is bad, but its misuse. Scores should be used to help the teacher plan the student's activities so he will be working on his weaknesses. If this is done in confidence, it can be most beneficial to the student. After all, it is far better to help a child improve where he has failed than to ignore the failure.

Finally, there is the bitter complaint that standardized test scores are unfair to minorities. When test results are published in newspapers comparing inner-city schools with suburban schools, the raw scores are often misleading.

It is well known that some minority groups generally have done well on standardized tests. This is most often true of children from low socioeconomic groups from minority as well as majority groups. A school with a high percentage of poverty level children usually scores very low, while a school with low proportions of poor children tend to score higher.

That should not come as a surprise to anyone. Yet, the publicity surrounding these test scores tends to depress the enthusiasm for improvement. In fact, it could act to negatively label entire populations—much as the failing student is labeled.

Again, some who acknowledge this complaint contend that it is not the test that is at fault. They say that it is the use of the test results. In addition, the more we repeat that minority children and poor children cannot perform, the more that becomes the case. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Some believe that we should never compare schools or districts with each other or with national norms. Others believe that only by making these comparisons can we begin to solve the problem of the failure of many of our schools to measure up to others in test results.

In any case, even though the debate rages, you should be aware that your constituents (all of them) will want to know how good their schools are and they are going to want to see test scores. For better or for worse, our schools are being judged more and more by the results of such tests.

Policy tip: Your board's testing policy should require that the test results be properly interpreted and reported, regardless of which tests are given.

Evaluating the education program

"I keep a big, fat folder on the performance of each child in my class. My documentation is so complete, hardly anyone asks about standardized test scores."
—Teacher, California

To evaluate the instructional program, you and your board have to do more than look at student test scores. At times, test scores are important, useful indicators of how well teachers teach and students learn, but they are reflections of only a part of the education program.

Establishing a mindset for evaluation

When you approach evaluation, you have to think comprehensively about many aspects of education:

○ The goals you and your board have set for your program. You can judge the effectiveness of the educational program only when you know whether it is doing what the board has decided it wants done.

○ The subject matter and content that make up the school curriculum.

○ The instructional materials and the resources the board has allocated over the years to give teachers the teaching tools they need.

○ The resources and funds the board has allocated for the in-service education of teachers.

○ The final product: the student and his skills, knowledge, and attitudes; and his ability to move on to the next phase of life—college, a job, marriage, or whatever endeavor he chooses.

Ways boards evaluate

When you look at evaluation in this larger framework, you can see that it is something more than can be done at one meeting, or completed in two. Evaluation can be carried out in three major ways, or a combination of these ways.

Set in motion a special and intensive evaluation program, directed by experts outside your district. They may spend a year, more or less, and finally come up with a report and recommendation for further action. It is the board's responsibility to read the report, hear the recommendations, and consider taking whatever follow-up actions are recommended. Such intensive, one-shot evaluations were more popular a generation ago and are still used by districts which can afford them.

Request staff and administrators to evaluate the education program or, more specifically, parts of it. A program can be evaluated by subject matter (How are we doing in reading? How are we doing in social studies?), or by grade level (What is the story on the middle school curriculum? What improvements do we need in the senior high school?). Again, the board's responsibility is to hear reports, consider recommendations for change or improvements, and follow through with the necessary actions and budgetary provisions.

Do more than authorize, passively listen, approve, or disapprove. Deeper, more direct involvement will bring about interaction with staff and administrative efforts in evaluation, with students, parents, and community representatives, and with methodology and instructional materials.

Evaluation from the board room

Your board's efforts will begin in the board room and may end there. They also may range into the classroom, the media center or library, the home, and the community.

At board meetings, the board can ask for briefings, presentations, and reports from:

○ *The superintendent* who will give his view of the impact and efficacy of the total education program, or parts of it.

"Twenty-four percent of the students interviewed were favorable to the new education program, 22 percent were neutral, 18 percent were negative, and 36 percent dozed off during the questioning."

- *Curriculum specialists* who may take up, at different times, topics ranging from reading and arithmetic to foreign languages and secondary science.
- *Faculty members* who should have an opportunity to tell the board what is happening in their classrooms.
- *Students* who should be given time to react to teaching, textbooks, tests, examinations, and report cards.
- *Parents* who may bring complaints or requests, and vent their feelings about what the schools are teaching and how they are teaching it.
- *Employers* who may give the board their ideas of the employability of graduates and the kind of schooling that would increase the chances of students to get jobs while in school or upon graduation.
- *Testing specialists* who should interpret to the board results of standardized testing, competency tests, or other large-scale assessments of the students.

Observation in the classroom

If you proceed from the board room to the classroom to gather information in your role as evaluator of the education program, follow good school protocol. Clear your projected visits with the superintendent who, in turn, will clear them with the principal.

When you enter a classroom for observation, be on the lookout for clues that will reflect the nature and quality of the instruction.

Is the room totally quiet and orderly? A modern classroom is often a beehive of activity, with pupils freely moving about, working in small groups, consulting reference works, and talking with their fellow students about the lesson.

Are all students doing the same thing at the same time? More and more, classrooms seek to provide for individual differences and individualized learning.

Is the teacher lecturing in front of the class? Efficient instruction calls for more than pupil listening. The effective teacher today often moves about, observing students at work, answering individual questions, helping those who need it, or setting in place instructional materials which students need.

If you spend a full period in the classroom, observe the extent to which students spend time directly on the lesson or on the learning tasks. "On task" time relates directly to the productivity of the classroom and the efficient use of student time. Interruptions by administrative details, diversions from the learning task by student misbehavior, and aimless student or teacher talk reduce the "on-task" time and indicate that the eductional program is not delivering fully what it could.

When observing a classroom, there are special things to look for.

Evaluating instructional materials

In the media center, the school library, and other locations (principal's office, teacher center, curriculum office), you will find copies of textbooks, curriculum guides, and courseware used for instruction through microcomputers and other teaching devices.

As you examine these materials, you may find much that you like, some few things that you dislike or oppose, and still other instructional materials that may make you wonder how they got past the school board. The answer to the last point is that not all instructional materials can or should pass board scrutiny. Many boards review only installations of major instructional programs.

If you find instructional materials that you question, however, you can bring them to the attention of the board chairman and the superintendent. But remember: There are correct ways to remove objectionable materials from the classroom and library. Censorship is not one of them. Your school board policy manual should cover that point.

Evaluating the school product

The foregoing discussion deals mostly with evaluating the *process* of the education program; that is, how the district goes about schooling youngsters. More difficult is to evaluate the *product* of the education program—the outcome and result of the processes, methods, and instructional tools.

The quality of the product, which is the youth who has left school, can be approached by asking:

○ How many (or what percentage) of students have been accepted in colleges and universities?

○ What types of post-secondary institutions are they (liberal arts, technical, professional, junior, four-year)?

○ How many students had no difficulty getting jobs? How many were unemployed and for how long?

○ What percentage of graduates vote? Take part in municipal affairs? In volunteer work? (This is one clue to the effectiveness of social studies.)

○ What evidence exists to determine whether the district's youth attend concerts, ballet, or the theater?

○ How do students perform on standardized tests?

○ Are there any facts about the leisure time activities the youth pursue? Are these activities wholesome? Do they add to the quality of life of the graduates?

Such questions and others which can be devised are not easy to answer. To obtain the facts needed, a school district has to initiate follow-up studies of high school graduates or launch longitudinal surveys 5 or 10 years after a class graduates.

If the proof is in the pudding, then it is the product of the schools that must be used by boards which want to evaluate or validate educational programs.

SUGGESTION

Don't judge a course or evaluate a teaching program on the basis of a single text or library book. Study the comprehensive reports from curriculum or textbook committees on the criteria used in the selection of instructional materials. There may be some good reasons why the book you think inappropriate is in fact educationally useful.

14

THOSE OTHER MATTERS

SUPPORT
SERVICES

If you allow it to happen, the noninstructional responsibilities of a board can overwhelm you. *It is impossible and unnecessary for a board member to try to become an expert on the many aspects of support services and other noninstructional concerns of the schools.*

Simply put: The prudent board member does not become involved in the daily management of school operations. However, you and your colleagues might select some noninstructional aspects of board governance on which to concentrate, such as the food program, transportation, discipline, or managing declining enrollment, because these most often affect the climate of learning and the ability of the student to concentrate on subject matter.

The role of board members in addressing these matters may seem more remote than in other areas of school governance, but it is actually quite typical. The thin, often hazy line between "hands off" (administration) and "hands on" (policy) presents the same tightrope act for board members to perform in the noninstructional arena as it does in personnel, curriculum, and other subjects which directly impact the classroom.

Even though support services appear to be one of the clearest examples of a "hands off" area, the line of demarcation between the board's role and the functions of the superintendent and other administrators is drawn with the same drafting tools. The board's "hands on" role includes:

- ○ *Approval of policy* which establishes, expands, curtails, or ends a program.
- ○ *Annual budget approval* which includes judgments about the nature and future of funded programs.
- ○ *Supervisor control* through approval, revision, or disapproval of job descriptions for top-level supervisors or directors of programs. Many boards also exert control through approval of candidates recommended for employment.
- ○ *Control of directions* through establishment of plans, goals, and priorities for the future operation of the schools.
- ○ *Oversight and evaluation of programs.* The board receives reports from the administration on progress and problems. It also reviews and evaluates programs and staff implementation of policy. The board also provides a major communication channel for reactions from parents and citizens about the performance of the school system.

As you examine the various support programs and other noninstructional concerns in this chapter, keep in mind these points of decision, involvement, and control which define the role of the board.

School transportation

***"We cut $5,000 a month off our transportation costs by running our scheduling through a computer. It figured out the best routes to follow, and we save on both gas and time."* —Board member, Wisconsin**

Many more boards have become involved in the whys and wherefores of transporting students because of the need to bus handicapped students, to achieve a racial balance in the schools, and to cut transportation costs.

Providing bus service

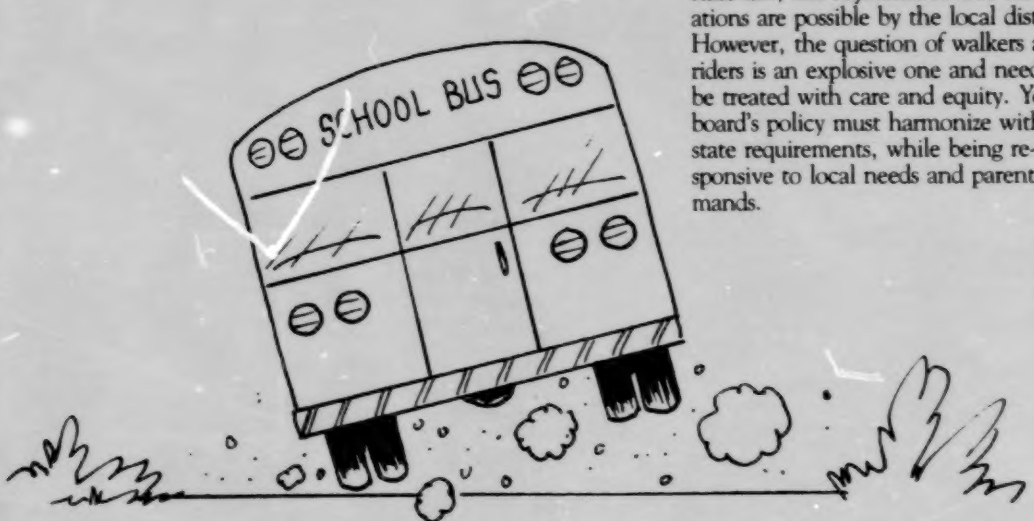
The biggest transportation decisions you and your board colleagues will face are:

○ Should you own and operate your own fleet of school buses?

○ Should you contract with a private firm to supply the transportation services needed by your schools?

There are advantages and disadvantages either way. Owning a bus fleet has been the favored approach. More than 60 percent of school districts owned and operated bus fleets at the beginning of the decade. Rising costs, however, have forced many boards to analyze the desirability of a change. Changeover from one method to the other is a serious step which requires both time and preparation. Economy, safety, and punctuality are the reasons most often cited for making a change.

Only detailed study by your administration will point to one or the other method. Here are some things to consider:



Owning the fleet. PRO: Your district has complete control of the type of bus to choose for your fleet. You can choose, train, and supervise the bus drivers. When you improve management or increase efficiency of operations, the savings go to the district, not to the private operator.

CON: District-owned buses will wear out, requiring repairs and replacement. This often amounts to a sizable investment of school dollars. Storage of the bus fleet can also be a problem where land is scarce or the climate requires inside storage.

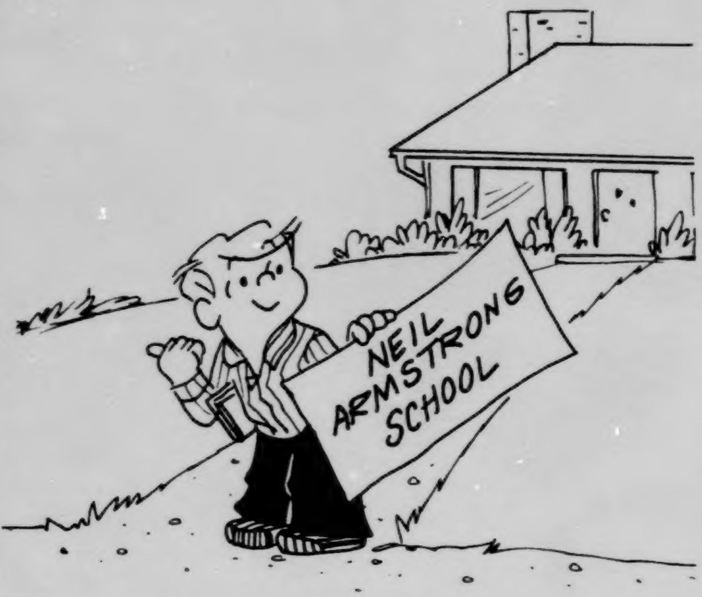
Contracting for services. PRO: The district does not have to worry about bus repairs and vehicle replacement. When necessary, it is easier to put an extra bus or two into operation without bidding or waiting for delivery of the vehicle. In contracting, your district is also relieved of some labor problems—hiring, firing, grievances, negotiating with and paying bus drivers, and the payment of retirement and other fringe benefits.

CON: The district is not in direct control of the operating safety of the buses, the punctuality of schedules, or the quality and training of bus drivers. If you already have a bus fleet, changing methods requires elimination of the existing vehicles and support equipment without incurring an unjustifiable capital loss.

Managing bus services

At least six other important policy decisions are required of boards overseeing school transportation:

1. Deciding who shall walk and who shall ride. This is usually decided by state law, but adjustments and variations are possible by the local district. However, the question of walkers and riders is an explosive one and needs to be treated with care and equity. Your board's policy must harmonize with state requirements, while being responsive to local needs and parents' demands.



Tips for a policy statement: Provide different eligibility requirements for using the school bus for children of different ages and grade levels. A special policy to cover transportation services for the handicapped is essential. If your policy includes a provision for "exceptions to the rule," it should spell out criteria for administrators to use, and establish final authority for making such decisions at a specific level recommended or determined by the superintendent.

2. Establishing bus routes and schedules. This, too, can be a touchy issue. The fact that bus routes can be set up with the help of computers does not make the question less volatile. If dissatisfied with the stops or waiting time for children, parents will blame the board, not the computer.

Tips for a policy statement: Set acceptable limits on waiting time for children at bus stops. Recognize the danger of crossing busy streets and highways. State strict criteria for use of private, unpaved, or unmaintained roads as bus routes. Require administrators to work with parents and the police in establishing bus routes.

3. Setting up safety and accident procedures. Your board's policy manual should require administrative procedures for the inspection and maintenance of school vehicles. In addition, the board should require the development of administrative procedures to be used in case of breakdowns or accidents.

Tips for a policy statement: Require that a school bus driver's handbook be prepared and distributed for use by all bus drivers. Some states have detailed statutes or regulations governing school buses and drivers which should be included in the policy manual appendix.

4. Deciding who shall drive a school bus. The school bus driver is a representative of the school system. Parents often have more contact with the school bus driver than with any other school employee. To children, he is a figure of authority.

Tips for a policy statement: With your administration, work out standards for health, character, and operating skills of bus drivers, and for their relationships with the children. Make sure your policies are compatible with state law.

5. Regulating student conduct on school buses. The development of a code of student conduct on school vehicles should receive as much attention as behavior codes for classrooms and school grounds. The mood and temper of a student is frequently established on the bus going to school. In addition, safety is involved. The rules should be strictly enforced and reviewed often with students, parents, and bus drivers.

Tips for a policy statement: Stipulate clearly the driver's authority while children are being transported. Provide for disciplinary actions for the first incident of student misbehavior, as well as subsequent incidents. Give parents fair warning that transportation for a student will be withdrawn if misconduct continues.

6. Providing transportation for enrichment of education. Carrying students to and from school is the first and paramount function of a pupil transportation system. But don't overlook the value of transportation for broadening and enhancing classroom instruction and extracurricular activities. The payoff in better learning should be balanced against costs.

Tips for a policy statement: Provide authority for administrators and teachers to use school vehicles for field trips which are instructional in nature; for events which seek to enrich the education of students, and which—like sport and athletic events—contribute to the spirit of the school and morale of students; and for programs conducted on Saturdays and holidays, or during summer recess.

"We've made controlling transportation costs a priority; so we've asked that records be kept on every unit we operate. This way, we can pinpoint developments and know what has been done."
—Board member, Louisiana

USING PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

For urban and suburban districts, there may be a third form of transporting students to and from school: public transportation. Where public transportation exists, it can be a practical alternative.

Tokens, tickets, and special passes, paid for in part or wholly by the board, give students access to buses, subways and, in a rare instance or two, trolley cars. In some cities, public transit provides convenience to students equal to that of a school transport system.

There are problems, though, with public transit. Fares are rising, schedules are difficult to maintain, and the safety and maintenance records of some systems are questionable. Public transit should be used only for junior and senior high school students, according to the National Safety Council. Safety conditions, however, will vary from district to district.

Food services

“We'd never concerned ourselves with our food services' operation—until our students boycotted the lunchroom.” —Board member, California

“If your district's food service programs are going into the red or if students just aren't eating, you have a problem. The food you serve has to appeal to the people who have to eat it; price is irrelevant if the students hate the food.” —Board member, Georgia

True or False?

☐ ☐ The purpose of school food service is to help American farmers sell surplus agricultural products.

☐ ☐ The purpose of school food service is to help children from families at near-poverty levels get at least one good meal a day.

☐ ☐ The purpose of school food service is to develop in each child educationally sound nutrition habits and, through properly balanced meals, enhance students' learning abilities.

☐ ☐ The public schools have no business being in the food business.

The first three statements are generally accepted as based on fact; the fourth statement asks for an opinion. These few statements, however, cover most of the ramifications of providing food under public school auspices—the agricultural, social, educational, and administrative aspects.

It is against this background that board members have to make decisions about school food services. The major questions that will confront you and your board, from time to time, include:

Should the board maintain a school lunch program in each school? This is partly a question of philosophy, and partly one dependent on the socioeconomic conditions in your district.

Should a school board and its staff control and direct the eating habits of school children? On school grounds and during school hours: Yes. That, a consensus of school leaders indicates, is the essence of nutrition education. To most boards, this means two things: (1) adherence to nutritional standards set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and (2) prohibition of sales of non-nutritious foods in the schools.

Should a board contract with private food management services or rely on its own staff? An efficient school food service program requires many talents: people who know how to buy food; how to store, prepare, and serve it; how to set up and operate kitchen facilities; how to administer food service workers; and, above all, nutrition specialists who can promote sound food and eating habits among youngsters. If your district has these talents and can organize them, then “do it yourself” would be the answer. If not, contract with a private food management service. In either case, oversight by the board and evaluation of services must continue.

“To monitor the quality of the food served in our schools, we have a principal's luncheon each month where board members, the superintendent, and other administrators and guests eat lunch in a school. They sample the food, among other things.” —Board member, Oregon

“PIZZA? But I wanted curds and whey!”

Should your district have central kitchen facilities serving all schools, or should each school have its own kitchen? Or, one can add, should there be both centrally located kitchens for some school clusters, and individually operated kitchens for larger schools? These are managerial questions, and the answers should come from the superintendent and the business and food service managers. All three types of kitchens have been and are in use in various districts, and each has distinct problems and advantages.

Should we allow vending machines in school cafeterias and on school grounds? That depends on what they contain. Many school districts allow coin-operated machines which dispense fruit juice, dairy products, and other items on the approved nutrition list of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. School districts are advised by nutrition experts not to allow vending machines that dispense soft drinks, chewing gum, or candy.

Risk management and school insurance

"Say, Al, does our school insurance cover cafeteria riots?"

"When it comes to school insurance, hire an expert to handle it. Then forget the whole thing."

This attitude, expressed in different ways, predominates among school board members who know little about the intricacies of risk management and insurance and do not wish to become "two-day wonders" on the subject.

However, this attitude does not contribute to making sound policy decisions on this vital dollar-and-cents topic. A more practical approach, when questions of risk management and insurance appear on the agenda, is to ask:

- What does our board policy say?
- What does the superintendent say?
- What do the facts say?

Adopt a meaningful district policy

Some school district policies on risk management and insurance say little. Hence, they are an inadequate guide to school system practices. If that is the case in your district, the development of a sound board policy on these issues should be an item of high priority.

A board policy on risk management and school insurance will contain at least the following components:

Range and extent of coverage. The board should state its expectations with regard to the types of insurance it will provide and support, whether required by law or by board decision. The range of programs include:

- Property and equipment insurance—buildings and grounds, school buses, musical instruments, sports equipment.
- Liability insurance—general liability, board member liability, motor vehicle accident liability, and malpractice insurance (especially for school nurses).
- Theft and vandalism coverage.
- Fidelity bonds.
- Worker's compensation and unemployment compensation.
- Group life, health, and disability insurance.
- Multi-district self-insurance programs (Pennsylvania and Illinois are two states which have such programs.).

Responsibility for management. Who will be responsible for managing and guiding the district's insurance programs? A risk manager? Business manager? Assistant superintendent? Superintendent? The board's decision assigning responsibility should include a requirement of a job specification for the person, and a provision that the person regularly attend seminars or other in-service training sessions to keep abreast of public risk management practices and insurance law and developments.

Records and review. The board should schedule reviews of insurance and risk management programs once a year, specifying that the reviews shall be based on up-to-date records maintained by the person responsible for the insurance programs.

Purchase of coverage. Declare that the board will maintain insurance coverage

"We share the expertise and costs of a part-time risk manager with a neighboring district." —Superintendent, California

only with sound insurance companies which can provide the best service at the least cost and which comply with statutory requirements. The practice of getting quotations and bids should conform to law, municipal regulation, and established board policy. Remember, the lowest bid does not always provide the best coverage!

Conflict of interest, favoritism. Board members who engage in insurance business should never be allowed to participate in the insurance programs of the district; nor should there be any appearance of favoritism, nepotism, cronyism, or "trade offs" of any sort, overt or covert, in the purchase of insurance.

Tie-in to safety and loss prevention. Provide for cooperation between risk management personnel and maintenance personnel to coordinate and implement plans for fire, safety, and hazard inspection.

Limits on costs. Set limits on the total cost of insurance programs in relation to tax revenue. A figure which can be justified politically and practically runs about two percent of the total tax revenues.

Self-insurance. Grant the risk manager or other official authority to explore and to recommend self-insurance plans for the district. The policy will, of course, reserve to the board the final decision on such plans.

Asking for advice

A good policy on insurance will answer many questions when a specific item on the topic appears on the agenda. Yet no board member should play the role of insurance expert. Defer and refer to the superintendent, who may in turn defer to the risk manager or other responsible person. The superintendent's recommendation is a crucial component.

Assessing the facts

The superintendent's recommendation will be based on facts, and it is a board's function to bring the facts to light. Important questions to ask:

- What have been the total insurance costs for the past years? The past five years? What claims have been made?
- Do cost breakdowns of different insurance coverages suggest any possible savings?
- Do we have enough insurance on our buildings? On major items of equipment? Will it cover replacement costs?
- What is the extent of exclusions in our insurance policies?
- Are we on solid ground with regard to deductibles?
- Is the superintendent alert to offerings of package plans?
- Are the liability coverage limits adequate?
- Has the superintendent investigated possible cooperative plans of obtaining insurance coverage? Through state department help? With other school districts?
- Is the liability insurance coverage clear as to *who* is the insured? (Are you satisfied that the "named insured" phrase is clear?)
- If you are self-insured, what about the reserve funds? Are they adequate? Are they properly invested? Who is looking after them? Are they structured so that they cannot be tapped in times of fiscal crisis?

Looking at advances in the insurance industry

You may not have heard these two terms related to insurance:

Risk management. In large school systems, or those which can afford it, the board appoints a specialist in public risk management to take responsibility for insurance and other risk programs. He reports to the superintendent. Often, his main responsibility is just for property, casualty, and liability insurance; although he frequently is also responsible for group life, health, hospitalization, and other coverage. It may be a full-time or part-time assignment.

Among a risk manager's responsibilities and assignments are:

- Analyzing exposure to losses and claims throughout the district's operations and facilities.
- Keeping records of insurance programs, claims experience, and loss control programs.
- Helping with safety, loss prevention, and hazard-elimination efforts in the district.
- Recommending strategies for avoiding or transferring risk.
- Doing the preliminary work needed for getting quotations and bids.

Usually, the alert risk manager keeps abreast of insurance laws, regulations, and practices by attending formal seminars and training sessions. He knows

"We rely on a district insurance committee that makes recommendations and monitors problems." —Board member, Tennessee

the qualifications of the insurance companies eligible to do business with the district, but does not get too friendly with insurance agents. When he thinks it's time to change agents or insurance carriers, he says so.

The risk manager recommends to the superintendent plans for total self-insurance for some programs, and partial self-insurance for others, as the law permits. He should be ready to answer questions of board members at all times. Once a year, at least, he prepares a report reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of the district's insurance activities, and points to steps for saving money.

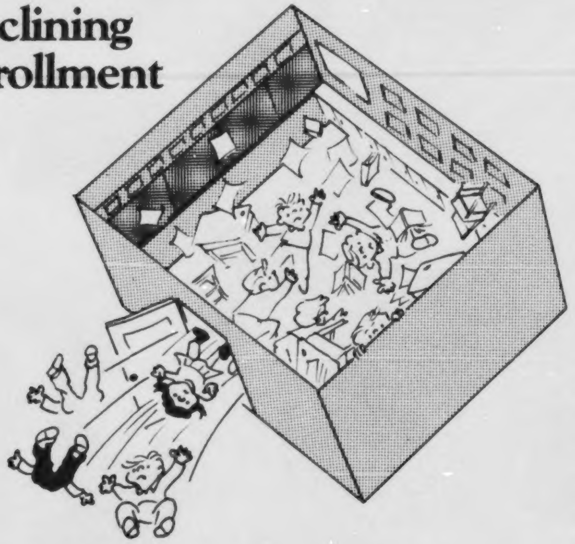
Self-insurance. It is not for every district, but it may be for yours. Under self-insurance, the school board—in effect—becomes the insurance agency, accepting the risks and the benefits. Since self-insurance is not designed to cover all needs of a district, your board will need expert help in deciding whether to start some aspect of self-insurance and how to go about it. State education and insurance officials and, possibly, your state school boards association can provide your district with details. Smaller districts should inquire about pooling self-insurance resources and programs with other districts.

"Your mileage from self-insurance will vary."
—Board member, Connecticut

Insuring board members

Because board members are individually and collectively responsible, legally, for their actions, board member insurance is a must. Most boards carry insurance, as one Virginia board put it, "to protect the individual members of the board, its agents, and the educational interest of the county, as well as to indemnify board members and agents of the board for their official actions in the service of the county schools."

Declining enrollment



With the coming of the '70s, something new and strange began happening in America's public schools. Elementary student enrollment began to shrink; classrooms began emptying; and, within three or four years, hundreds of school buildings stood vacant—surplus educational space.

School districts in New England, the middle Atlantic states, and the Midwest were hit hard, with such states as Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan reporting enrollment drops ranging up to 20 percent and the closing of hundreds of schools. Except for the Sun Belt, very few parts of the country were left untouched.

"Declining enrollment can be an educational disaster or an educational renaissance. How your district comes through the decline depends on how you approach the situation—as a problem or as an opportunity."
—Superintendent, Colorado

Demographers have explained that the drop in student enrollment primarily was due to the lowered birthrate in prior years. They gave two other reasons: the migration of families from the North and West to the South, and the drift of students to private schools. School districts, which had been building new classrooms at an unprecedented rate for 20 years, began to ask, "Where have all the students gone?"

In response, boards and administrators did what seemed natural. They closed and consolidated schools. They reduced the numbers of teachers and administrators. They eliminated or curtailed educational programs.

As for the vacant school buildings, there was a rush in some districts to sell, rent, board up, or turn them over to municipal authorities for disposition. At a school boards' convention in 1978, one board member said: "Our cry last year was, 'Wanna buy a school?' This year it's, 'Wanna buy two schools?' "

As the '70s drew to an end, board members and administrators looked back to assess 10 years of experience and the prospects for the next two decades.

Item. Population projections indicate an end to the decline in elementary school enrollments by 1984, accompanied by the beginning of a sharp decline in secondary school enrollments, which demographers predict will continue through the end of the century.

Item. Large numbers of districts which had not been affected by declining enrollments during the '70s face the prospect of a decline in elementary and middle schools during the '80s.

Item. Nearly all districts (except for those in the Sun Belt states, Nevada, Idaho, and Utah) will experience drops in secondary school enrollments.

Making decisions for the future

What kinds of questions will boards address as they cope with the second phase of decline? What kinds of decisions will they have to make?

How can a board prepare for the changes that declining enrollments bring? Planning, PLANNING, *PLANNING!* Hundreds of school districts gave this advice in response to a national survey conducted in 1980. Planning invariably involved creating a citizen task force. In all parts of the country and in districts of all sizes, the citizen planning committee dominated the first stages of managing decline.

What does a citizen planning task force do? Basically, it lays the foundation for board decisions. Specifically, task forces:

- Make projections for immediate and long-range district population and student enrollment (5 to 10-year projections are most common).
- Gather facts about the physical condition of school buildings and facilities.
- Acquire citizen views regarding possible school closings and changes in programs.
- Help prepare timetables for school closings.
- Suggest methods for disposition of surplus property.
- Communicate to the people the facts about enrollment decline.
- Help the board make necessary, but often unpalatable, decisions.

Speaking of the need to listen to the community, one board veteran explains: "Seven years ago, our board arbitrarily closed some schools. This created an adverse relationship between the board and the community for three years. The board's relationship with the community improved only after we did a lot of listening."

Boards have to put declining enrollment into the perspective of the community. It's easy to look at numbers, but you also have to deal with the ownership feelings people have for their schools. Boards must let people know that their opinions count.

What board policies are involved in dealing with declining enrollments? Among the policies a board should tune up to be ready for changes brought on by declining enrollments are:

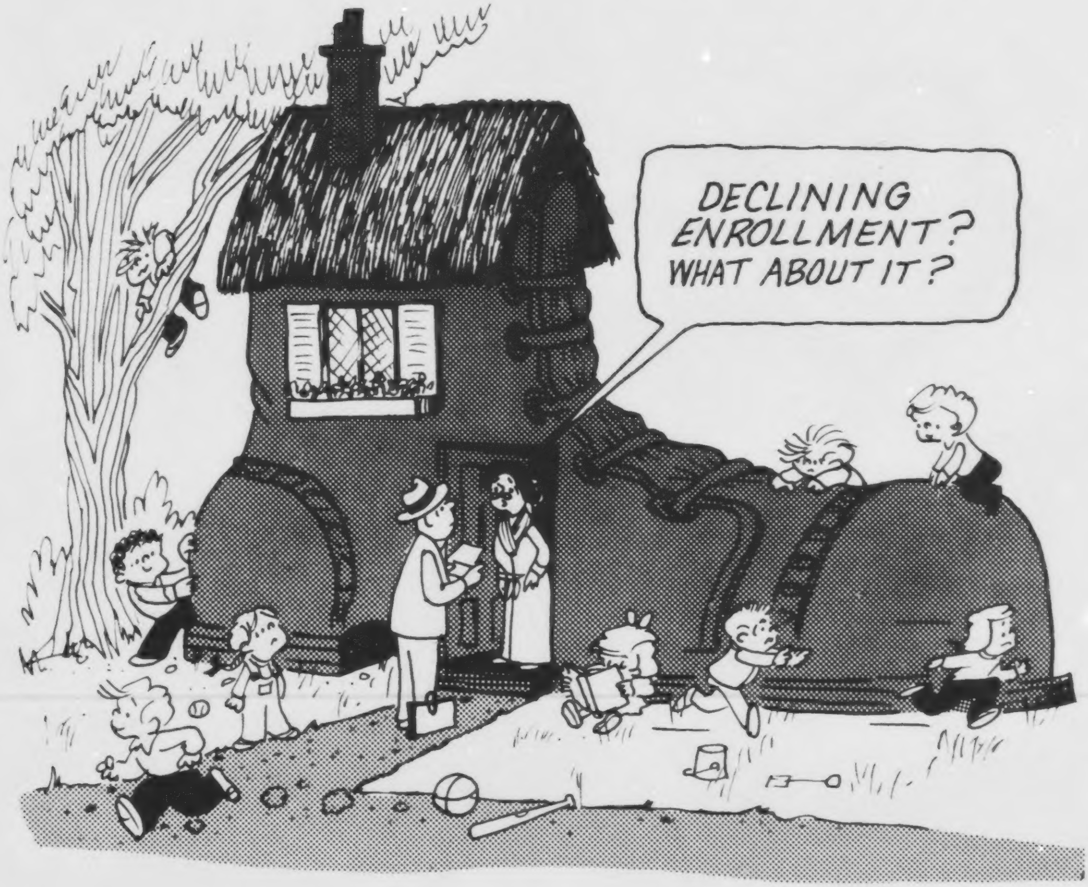
- *Policies affecting district organization*
  - Attendance areas
  - Districting and redistricting
  - Organization of instruction
  - Optimum size for schools
  - Grade patterns and organization
  - Class size
- *Policies affecting staff*
  - Reduction-in-force (RIF)
  - Tenure of teachers
  - Staff seniority
  - Early retirement
  - Transfer and reassignment of staff
  - Evaluation of staff
- *Policies affecting citizens*
  - Citizen planning committees
  - Advisory committees to the board
  - Community involvement in policy making
  - Public participation at board meetings
- *Policies affecting property, facilities, and types of funds*
  - Retirement of facilities
  - Surplus property
  - Leasing of school property
  - Joint leasing
  - Management of funds
- *Policies affecting students*
  - Transfer of students
  - Assignment of students
  - Orientation of students to new schools

What information does a board need to make sound adjustments regarding the impact of decline? To prepare for wise decisions, a board may call for hundreds of pages of facts, projections, charts, estimates, and alternative measures. These often seek to answer the following questions:

- During a period of decline, how can we decide which educational programs are important? Which courses can be dropped, and which must stay?
- What educational patterns (K-3? K-7? Middle schools? Four-year senior high schools?) have been most effective in adapting to enrollment drops?
- To what extent are we making efficient use of, or underutilizing, the buildings and classrooms now in operation?

> ***"When dealing with declining enrollment, you shouldn't be for or against a certain approach before you explore it. Don't pit people against one another. Listen to the community, take their information, and put it to use."***
> ***—Board member, Oregon***

***"When you hold a public hearing on the proposed closing of a school, it's always the people personally involved who come. Often, they don't care what your statistics are; they want their school kept open."
—Board member, District of Columbia***


DECLINING ENROLLMENT? WHAT ABOUT IT?

***"The hardest questions to answer are those that are sociological or psychological: the value judgments of how a child can be 'harmed' by a transfer, for instance."
—Board member, Washington***

○ What is the physical condition of each building and what is the cost of maintaining it up to adequate standards?

○ What is the current student enrollment and what are the enrollment projections, year by year, for the next 5 to 10 years?

○ What economic and social conditions in the district will affect the schools? Are new housing developments possible? Is new industry planning to come in, or is existing industry planning to move? What about highway construction plans? Will they affect neighborhoods positively or negatively?

○ What are the community attitudes and feelings about the traditions of each school? How deep is loyalty to each school?

○ What would be the magnitude and variations of savings in projected school closings? Are these savings substantial enough to offset increased costs of operation during the next several years?

○ What safety, traffic, and transportation problems would parents and students face under changes due to school closings or consolidations?

○ How many teachers and administrators will be affected by enrollment drops during the coming years and how can the board deal with this "people problem"?

What criteria should a board use in deciding which schools to close? A decision to close or consolidate schools is always difficult, often controversial and, sometimes, almost impossible. After the board has spent scores of hours on the question, the community will often rise in protest and ask, "Why *our* school?"

Use of objective criteria is essential, and even that process will not allay public ire in many communities. Criteria, though, do provide a basis for the best possible answers to some difficult questions. Here are some of the major checkpoints many boards use in deciding whether to close a particular school:

- Age.
- Physical condition.
- Capacity and enrollment.
- Cost of maintenance.
- Articulation with other buildings and facilities.
- Can it be heated at reasonable costs? Air conditioned?
- What is its usefulness for the next 5 to 10 years?
- What type of neighborhood is it located in: safe, high crime rate, developing, deteriorating?
- Does it have any special facilities—studios, swimming pool, art rooms, auditorium, shops, laboratories—which would be costly to duplicate?
- What are the traffic patterns in the school's environment and what will they be in the near future?
- What effect will the school closings have on the neighborhood, and the stability of home, real estate values?
- What are possibilities for the recycling or conversion of the building? Would they enhance the educational system?

What shall we do with our vacant space? During the first phase of enrollment decline, the answer to this question came easy to many boards. They sold, razed, or locked up buildings until something turned up. Boards also temporarily rented vacant space and, in some instances, leased it for longer periods.

Board policies often require that vacant schools and classrooms first be used for the benefit of the school system itself: offices for classroom teachers and supervisors; or improved space for counseling, art, music, and recreation. Facilities for adult education have been given a high priority in space not needed for elementary and secondary students.

As a second level of use, boards make schools available to county or municipal agencies for recreation, child care, youth activities, and craft and hobby centers for senior citizens. Use of public school buildings for community college purposes is a favored and acceptable approach. The buildings are either offered free, under carefully drafted use agreements, or are rented or leased. Joint leasing, an arrangement under which some classrooms are retained for regular instruction, while other classrooms in the same building are leased to education-oriented agencies, is a growing practice.

An emerging policy on reuse of school buildings is to work out plans with municipal officials or citizen groups rather than with real estate operators. In essence, the goal is to use the vacant schools, when possible, for enhancement of education in the community. (*Note*: In districts where school buildings and property are owned by the city or county, the board often has no final say regarding the use of a disposed school. These boards can, however, make recommendations for the future use of these schools.)

What do we do about the high school? Most boards' decisions about their high schools will not be a question of closures, since more than two-thirds of the nation's school districts have only one high school. These boards will have to determine how the high school, with its shrinking enrollment, can survive and become stronger, even if smaller.

Prospects for the future include:

- Phasing out junior high schools (with the middle schools becoming dominant) and making the four-year high school the major agency for serving adolescents.
- Pooling students, sharing teachers, and merging facilities with high schools in neighboring districts.
- Using technology (cable TV, tapes, films, and recordings) in classes in which there are limited numbers of students.

Boards will also have to decide whether they want to place half-empty, secondary school plants at the disposal of the community. New types of clients can fill many high school classrooms. This will mean new policies and procedures for use agreements through which the district can reach out to senior citizens, homemakers, former dropouts, and unemployed youth.

SUGGESTION

For more help in managing decline, read Declining Enrollment - Closing Schools, *a Critical Issues report published in 1981 by the American Association of School Administrators.*

LEASING SCHOOL FACILITIES

As enrollments decline and populations shift, more and more school districts find themselves with empty classrooms and vacant school buildings. Boards face decisions regarding the disposition of this property. Of the several choices, one which is endorsed strongly is leasing.

Three concepts underlie today's practices in leasing school buildings:

Concept: A school building belongs not only to the board of education but to the entire community as well. Therefore, the people should have some voice in the disposition of the plant. Many school boards name a citizen advisory committee to help decide the leasing procedure.

Concept: The re-use of a building, through leasing, should enhance the education of the district. This means that agencies and groups concerned with educational and cultural activities should have first choice in acquiring a lease. Community colleges, day care centers, adult education services, and senior citizen councils operating recreational and instructional programs are examples of preferred lessees. A second level of preference could be community recreation agencies, educational broadcasters, and arts and craft centers.

Concept: If other than educational or cultural activities are to be housed in former school buildings, then the municipal authorities should have a high priority for the lease. This brings assurance that the former school building will be used for nonprofit purposes and for the good of the community.

If your board decides to lease a school building, your district becomes involved in real estate management. Boards usually rely on the superintendent, who may in turn consult the business manager, a property management official, the school attorney, or a consultant in real estate. Their task is to present the board with a written lease which:

- ○ Protects the value of the plant.
- ○ Brings to the board a fair return in rental fees.
- ○ Houses tenants desirable to the board.

For some boards, the most important feature of a lease is the clause which stipulates that, should the board need the building at some future time, a mechanism will exist for its return.

A note about joint leasing

A special problem for boards occurs when one or more school buildings are only half empty. That is, some of the classrooms and facilities of the building (shops, labs, music rooms) are needed for instruction of the district's students, but other space is unused. One cost-effective approach is joint leasing. School districts in Maryland, Wisconsin, California, and other states have become expert in drawing up leases which provide for the co-existence of regular schooling activities with those of other agencies.

The concepts governing joint leasing are the same as for leasing an entire building. Through lease stipulations, the board must make certain that the teachers and students are protected from interference and disturbances which may result from having two major tenants in one building.

Deciding who will use school facilities

Make one decision and spare yourself the troubles of making a hundred others.

This happy principle can be applied with good effect on the issue of who will use school buildings and grounds. Once your board goes through the process of developing a school policy on the use of buildings, it should not have to confront that question again, except in the most extraordinary cases.

These suggestions may help your board develop its policy:

- ○ Encourage and promote the use of school facilities for educational, cultural, and community purposes when they are not being used for student instruction and activities.
- ○ Set priorities. For example, your policy might provide that, as with the leasing of school property, first claim on the use of school buildings will go to individuals and groups conducting educational, charitable, and community-interest activities or programs which are open to the public, and for which no admission fees are charged. Second claim will go to business and private groups for programs of worthy educational, civic, or charitable intent.
- ○ Develop a system of differential fees, based on the cost of operating the facility; including maintenance, utilities, supervision, and custodial care.
- ○ Security of the buildings, protection against abuse of property, and conduct acceptable to the community should be among the concerns of the superintendent in preparing procedures for use by community groups.
- ○ Requests for use of school facilities by groups considered controversial by some citizens should receive consideration by the superintendent. The school board should not be placed in

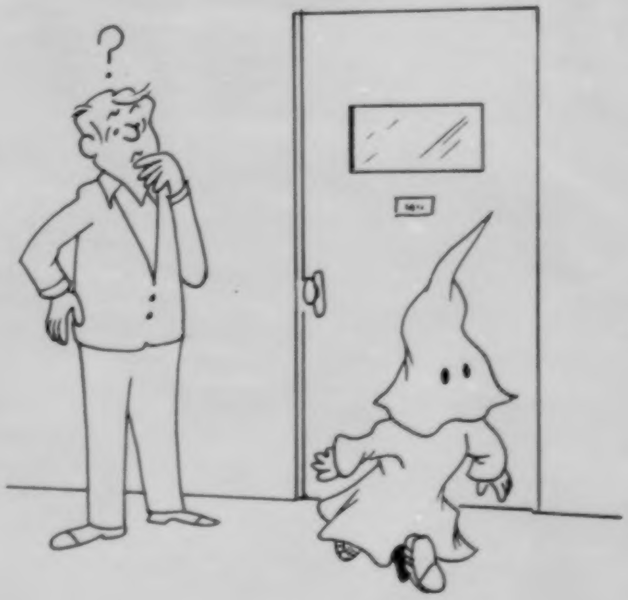
the position of opposing constitutional freedoms of expression and of assembly.

- Written policies, guidelines, and procedures for community use of buildings should be publicized from time to time and should always be available for examination by any citizen or group.
- Police protection should be required by the superintendent as a condition of building use, if the situation warrants it. The user should pay for police protection or for other necessary security measures.

Questions to ask

As you and your board make decisions regarding the use of school facilities, answer these questions:

- Are special policies or procedures needed for use of the cafeteria, swimming pool, auditorium, and outdoor sports and athletic facilities?
- Are you satisfied that your policy governing the use of school facilities by "controversial" groups (such as the Klu Klux Klan) is clear enough to be applied and enforced by the superintendent? Does the school attorney concur?



- Is board policy specific about the use of school buildings by church-related groups?
- Do you have policies and procedures regarding payment, deposit, and use of fees from rentals by community groups?

Student discipline

Discipline? That's the teacher's job. If the teacher can't handle the troublesome student, let the principal do it.

Discipline? It's everybody's job. Parents, teachers, students, administrators, board members, the community—everybody.

There is enough truth in both of these statements to make them plausible as solutions to the problems of disruptive students.

Unhappily, neither concept is practical enough to be of use.

The so-called authority figures of teacher and principal (often assistant principal) can cope with minor infractions in the classroom or on school grounds. But the establishment of a district-wide climate for learning, free from disruption and safe from violence (and that is, after all, the purpose of discipline), is a matter for your board.

Turn to the other concept. True, discipline is everybody's business. But when that notion takes hold, it is often no one's business: "Let the other fellow take care of it," becomes the attitude. Only the board of education can take the actions which will muster teacher, administrator, parent, student, and community agencies to work for a safe learning environment.

First action, if you're concerned with improving student behavior, is to take a look at your policies covering the topic of students. Examine them for recency; for the ways they take into account new developments in your district, and changes in law and court decisions. If these policies haven't been updated in the last three years, the board has a major task ahead of it.

Discipline policy basics

One phase of that task is to rethink, develop, and set down in writing what the board means by discipline and what

> ***"To enjoy the rights of citizenship in the school community, the student must also accept the responsibility of that citizenship."* —*Board policy, Colorado***

should be its nature (tough? teacher dominated? developed cooperatively by teachers and students?); what types of offenses the board will not tolerate and how offenders will be punished; and what procedures the district is to use in dealing with trouble and with troublemaking students.

Your board policy manual should therefore contain statements covering three areas:

Discipline as philosophy. "A student's right to swing his fists ends where the other's nose begins," states one Michigan board's policy. "Conduct by any student which interferes with the right of others to learn in peace will not be tolerated," states a North Carolina board. And from a Connecticut board comes this statement: "The school's primary goal is to educate, not discipline. However, when the behavior of an individual student comes in conflict with the rights of others, corrective actions are necessary for the benefit of the individual and of the school."

Through such statements, boards send out signals to teachers, students, and parents about their beliefs and expectations. General and even idealistic, they serve a useful purpose when an attorney, court, or parent asks: "What is your philosophy on discipline?"

Discipline as punishment. A second element of discipline policy is lists and descriptions of student offenses and recommended punishments for each. Such lists often look awesome, as boards try to cover the wide range of possible student infractions: abusive language, arson, cheating, class cutting, drugs, fighting, molesting, smoking, theft, truancy, vandalism, weapons on campus. These are but a dozen items from lists that may run longer than two score.

Boards often group offenses into "minor" and "major," and note that repetition of minor offenses will be considered a major infraction. Punishments for minor offenses may include reprimands, parental contacts, or detention. Punishment for major offenses may include suspension of privileges, out-of-school and in-school suspension (1 to 10 days), expulsion, and criminal prosecution. The main point is, however: Set down in writing both the offenses and the punishments, and let there be no guessing about each.

Discipline as procedure. How faculty and administration act and react to student infractions has become an overwhelming concern in recent years. The school's response to student misbehavior—evenhanded or harsh, precipitous or orderly—is a matter which influences student morale, unrest, and rebellion.

It is for this reason that board discipline policies contain sections on student rights (along with responsibilities)—especially the student's right to due process mandated by the U.S. Supreme Court in the Ohio case of Goss *v. Lopez*.

At a minimum, due process requires school officials to inform the student of his alleged misbehavior, to hear the student's side of the story and, in some cases, to provide a hearing process for appeal of the disciplinary action. Decisions on student suspensions and expulsions must follow due process procedures. So do decisions on corporal punishment.

Your board will also have to act with care and caution when it considers policies on student grievance procedures and the rights of students to assemble peaceably for protests, to publish and distribute newspapers, or to exercise other means of verbal and non-verbal expression.

The student's right to some measure of privacy is also guaranteed. Any policy about searching student's persons, belongings, desks, or lockers should be assessed for legality. Your school attor-

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Board policy must consider the legal rights of students.

ney should be consulted on all aspects of policy and procedure which involve constitutional questions, such as search and seizure, due process, and the rights of free speech and assembly.

Policies for good behavior

Your board is now one-third of the way toward developing a district-wide climate that helps and enhances learning. In adopting policies which set forth the board's determination not to countenance misbehavior, or not to let it off easily, the board has proclaimed its punitive intentions. That is necessary. That is not enough.

Next should come policies to bring out the efforts of students and parents to prevent and control potential misbehavior:

What students can do. "There is no greater resource for good student behavior than the students themselves," states a study on student discipline by the American Association of School Administrators (1980).

"When you involve students in school-related activities, you give them an opportunity to enhance their school environment rather than destroy it," says the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

"The first responsibility of students is to know just what their responsibilities are." —Board policy, Ohio

Such principles are embodied in hundreds of board policies. Aided by them, school districts encourage students to:

- ○ Serve on committees developing codes of conduct.
- ○ Aid in preparing student handbooks and help in publicizing rules for the student body.
- ○ Serve as ombudsmen to relay to school officials student gripes and grievances.
- ○ Help other students ("peers") who have trouble with classroom work or who exhibit delinquent tendencies.
- ○ Serve on building discipline committees (with parents and staff members) to review or cope with disciplinary cases.

Student government, when it's open to all students and is not used as a patsy by the administration, can be a strong force for good school citizenship. So can a rich variety of extracurricular activities which include more than sports for the few; but clubs, societies, forums, and competitions for the many.

Neither strong student government, nor a rich program of extracurricular activities, can exist without board commitment. Your policies will have to support such programs not only in principle, but also with money. Good discipline may make it worth the price.

"Our speaker's topic is 'Enforcing Codes of Student Behavior'."

What parents can do. Parent involvement is one of the great potential forces for controlling and improving student behavior. It's also one of the most underutilized.

"When boards become overly protective of student rights, they are accused of being 'soft on discipline.' When they stress student responsibilities and obligations, they are accused of 'cracking down on the kids.'" —Board member, North Carolina

Traditionally, the school has called upon the parent to take a misbehaving student home and to punish him. Just as frequently, the school has called in the parent for a conference at which warnings and dire predictions about the student's future were announced.

Such practices are still rampant. Where a district limits the role of parents to such approaches, parent power is underutilized.

A review of nearly 1,000 board policies shows that boards are reaching out toward parents in new ways—and that parents are responding. As a result, districts large and small are:

- ○ Involving parents in the development of school board discipline policies.
- ○ Getting parent participation in developing codes of student conduct.
- ○ Encouraging "the presence of parents" in school buildings as volunteer teacher aides and as resource persons for instruction.
- ○ Getting parents to serve on building and district-wide discipline committees that will keep an eye on trends in student behavior, review disciplinary cases, and lend support to teachers and principals.

○ Giving parents a voice and role in developing due process procedures for cases of vandalism and crime.

Ourselves, our programs. In setting policy, your board should ask not what is wrong with students and how to change them, but what is wrong with the schools themselves and their programs.

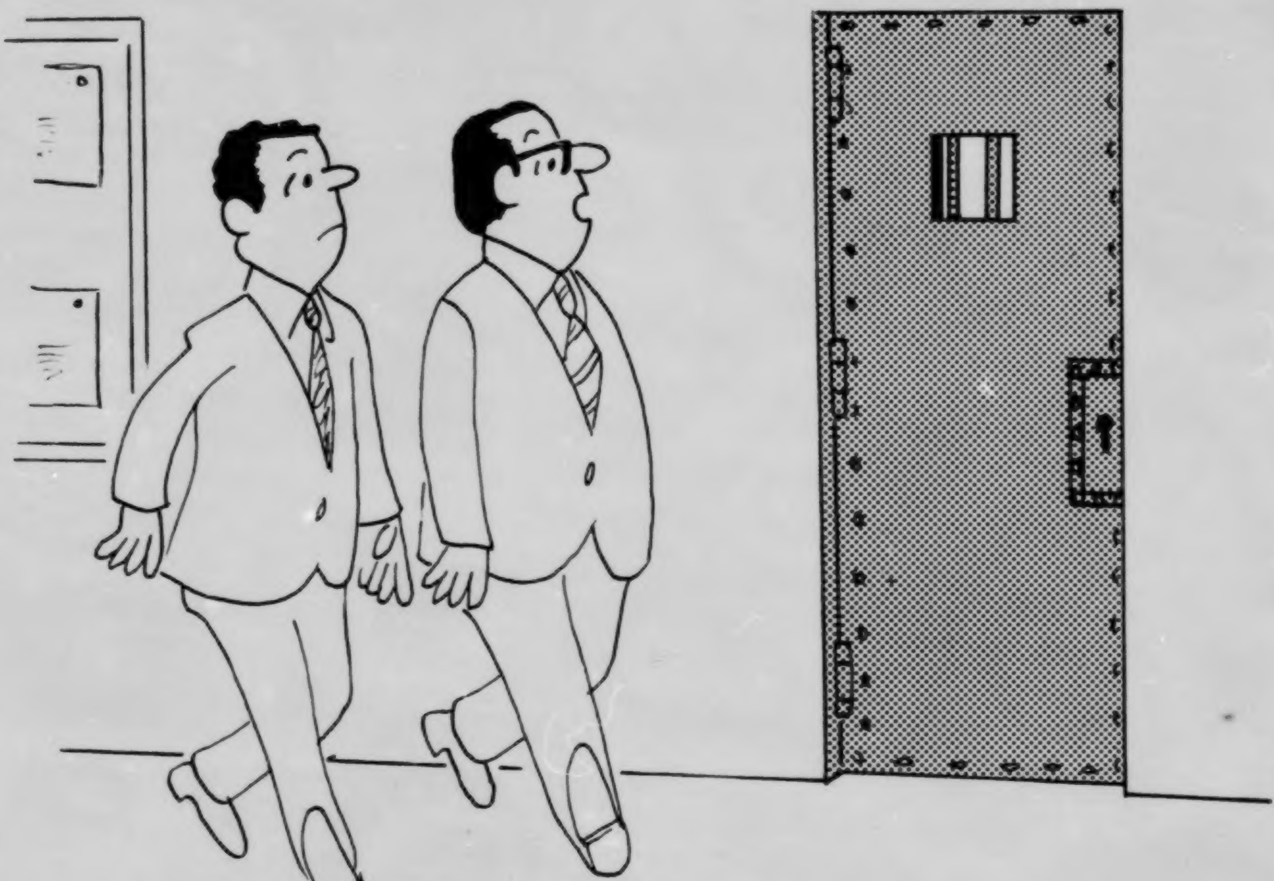
Recent research has established two facts that may surprise you. One is that classroom teachers themselves often cause student misbehavior. The second is that the curriculum may be the real mischief-maker and a chief contributor to the incidence of truancy, class-cutting, tardiness, apathy and, eventually, to student insubordination and rebellion.

If these cases of misconduct are to be eliminated, or reduced, only board leadership will do it.

A board in Oregon believes that teachers create student misbehavior in at least three ways:

1. They fail to enforce rules of classroom behavior consistently—playing favorites with students, granting special attention to "pets," to the resentment of other children.
2. They are short, brusque, and insensitive to all but the brightest and "most obedient students," thereby shortchanging more than half the students in their class.
3. They lack skills of classroom management, using the old, ineffective

"Even-handedness in dealing with students requires equal emphasis on both the rights of students, and on their responsibilities to themselves, other students, and the school."
—Board member, Connecticut



"That's our room for in-school suspensions."

methods of threats, ridicule, and lowering of grades as weapons.

To ask a teacher without modern skills in classroom management to take charge of a class will serve only to increase the number of disciplinary cases. Intensive in-service activities are needed by the majority of teachers to help them understand the backgrounds of the children from single-parent families; appreciate the learning styles of minority children; deal with the angry and frustrated child; cope with the student hooked on tobacco or drugs; and value the integrity and worth of every child.

College courses have not taught and do not teach these aspects of teaching. In-service education, which consists of more than half-days of "professional growth," can fill the deficiencies in teacher education—but only as the board provides the policy support, the funds, the time, and the resources for such programs.

Finally, the curriculum. It disturbs many an educator and board when researchers conclude that what we teach and how we teach it creates widespread student apathy, boredom, and frustration; and that, in turn, these possibly lead to violence and crime.

Yet, such conclusions also come from practitioners. Consider these statements from school board members:

○ "There is a direct, strong connection between curriculum and behavior. The deadlier the curriculum, the greater the incidence of misbehaving students."

○ "The first line of defense against unruly students is a modernized, vibrant curriculum which engages the time, interest, and energy of students."

○ "The beginning of curriculum change is the beginning of improved discipline."

Curriculum reform, however, is difficult—an enterprise of years' duration. School districts chip away at the problem in many ways:

○ By improving counseling.

○ By instituting programs of individualized learning.

○ By reviewing and altering traditional courses and introducing new subject matter.

○ By strengthening basic courses of reading, writing, and arithmetic so that students can use these skills for success in more advanced subjects.

Alternative courses, alternative classrooms, and alternative schools are also means of curriculum reform. The student who is baffled by what takes place in the traditional classroom often comes to life in alternative programs which give him a fair chance to succeed.

One Ohio educator concluded in a study of discipline for Phi Delta Kappa: "We look upon discipline as one way of reaching our fixed curriculum goals. Perhaps we should also look at our fixed curriculum goals, and change them when necessary, if we are to bring about a climate of good discipline in our schools."

SUGGESTION

For more policy ideas for improving student discipline, read, Student Discipline: Problems and Solutions, *a Critical Issues report published in 1980 by the American Association of School Administrators.*

WHERE TO PUT POLICY EMPHASIS

When confronting the unruly student, where should boards place the emphasis—on preventive measures or on control and punishment?

On preventive measures, is the decisive reply of the school board members surveyed for a study conducted by the American Association of School Administrators.

Their view was that the greatest responsibility boards have is to get at the root causes of delinquent behavior in schools. "Attacking only symptoms by punishment," the report noted, "is like taking aspirin for a toothache. While the pain is temporarily eased, the fundamental cause of the discomfort remains."

According to the study: "Preventive strategies can best be carried out by concentrating on a good educational program; curriculum offerings sensitive to the needs of children and youth; humane school climate; staff development activities; parental involvement; and, above all, student involvement.

"All these need school board support through policy and action."

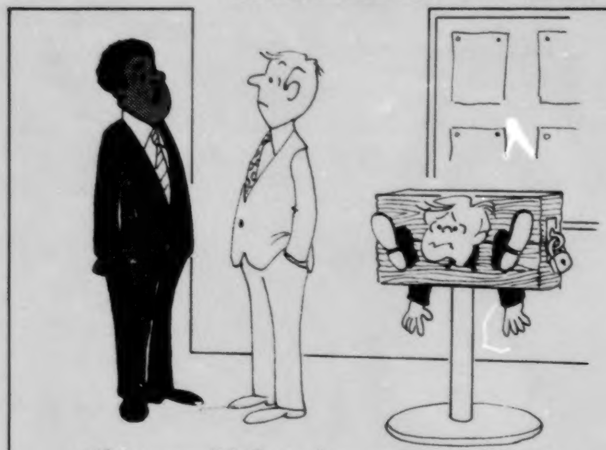
ESTABLISHING A CODE OF CONDUCT

Students will be better able to meet their responsibilities when they know precisely what they are. They may meet them with a bit more zeal if they know the consequences of failure to meet them. Your board's code for student conduct should:

○ Indicate what the board believes is acceptable behavior in schools and classrooms.

○ Indicate what the board believes is unacceptable.

○ Prescribe penalties and punishment for violation.



"Of course I believe there are many different and successful approaches to class control. However ...."

DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO DISCIPLINE: FINDING THE BEST COMBINATION

Approach 1: Getting tough

Your board decides to get tough on students who misbehave and disrupt classrooms. You announce to the community that students who do not wish to learn and who prevent other students from learning will be suspended or expelled.

The board unanimously adopts a code of student conduct which lists more than 30 possible student violations, from fighting to vandalism. For each violation, a punishment is listed—usually suspension or expulsion.

The superintendent submits a plan for corporal punishment (since your state does not prohibit it). To the minority of the board which opposes paddlings, the majority replies, "Parents want it and will support it."

Assessment: These decisions reflect a belief that students who violate the rules of conduct will change their behavior if severely punished, and that harsh measures will act as a deterrent to misbehavior. Used alone, this approach relies on *punitive measures* to bring about appropriate student behavior.

Approach 2: Asserting control

The board decides that classroom teachers need more help in controlling disruptive students, after one board member makes a speech which includes the sentence, "To ask a teacher to take charge of a class without modern skills in classroom management is like sending a soldier into battle without weapons training." The superintendent is authorized to bring in consultants to train teachers in "assertive discipline."

A board resolution also authorizes the employment of additional security guards to protect students from troublemakers in the school, and permits building principals to set up patrols of smoking areas, lunchroom facilities, and playgrounds.

Crisis intervention committees are established in each school building. Made up primarily of parents, these groups are expected to get promptly to the scene of trouble in a school and to respond appropriately to potentially dangerous trouble in schools. In addition, the board reviews and overhauls its policies dealing with police contacts and relations to make certain the district has ready access to help from law enforcement officers.

Assessment: This approach seeks to "put a lid" on refractory behavior, either by preventing it or by stamping it out as soon as possible. They are *controlling measures* only and are little concerned with reaching the causes and reasons for misconduct.

Approach 3: Developing self-control

The board decides to evaluate whether there is a relation between what is being taught and how it is taught, on the one hand, and the incidents of student disruption and misbehavior on the other. You and your colleagues ask for a report which will show the status of extra-class activities and student government. A board policy demands more emphasis on activities which will engage the energies and interests of all students.

In order to deal with staff approaches to discipline, the board adopts a policy to strengthen and broaden in-service education, so that it will emphasize a better understanding of today's youth, and will develop and encourage teaching styles which meet the needs of different types of children. The rationale for this decision is that "teachers themselves may cause disciplinary problems because they lack the training needed to work with children from many different backgrounds."

The superintendent wants to set up an alternative program for students who cannot live with either the rules or the content of the traditional classroom. The board gives its approval based on a belief that this alternative program will reduce the incidence of disruption in classrooms and the eruption of violence in the schools.

Assessment: These decisions are directed to finding the causes and providing long-range remedies for student unrest and consequent misbehavior. They are *developmental measures* aimed at the professional growth of teachers, the active participation of students, and changes in offerings.

Points for discussion

A combination of parts of all three approaches—punitive, controlling, and developmental—is usually the best means of creating a safe and healthy school environment which permits all students to learn without fear or disruption. However, there is a question of emphasis: Some boards, for example, opt primarily for punitive measures or controlling measures. A few have virtually eliminated expulsion and other harsh forms of reprisal.

The argument of whether punishment achieves much of anything practical has raged for centuries. On the other hand, there is less controversy about the role of better teaching, more useful and practical course offerings, and greater student involvement in the improvement of discipline. There may be a reason: The developmental measures (only three of which are given in Approach #3 out of a possible list of dozens more) have been relied upon in relatively few school systems.

Which types of measures are needed most in your district?

Which measures do you favor?

15

COMMUNICATION FOR YOU AND YOUR BOARD

"Star light, star bright, the first star I see tonight, please make sure I don't goof up my ability to communicate and be accountable!"

> ***"Not too long ago, publishing a school newsletter and holding an annual parent-teacher conference made up a communication program. Those days are gone forever."***
> ***—Board member, Massachusetts***

Effective communication doesn't just happen. It evolves from a well-planned and properly implemented communication program.

Although a communication *program* cannot be created spontaneously, communication often is. The simplest gestures of board members; the appearance of your campuses; your conduct at board meetings; your availability to constituents; the pride and work habits of your administrators, teachers, and students; and board involvement in civic and school activities are all subtle forms of communication.

If such things are left to chance by the board and its members, and by the school administration and staff, poor communication can result. Each district needs a planned and systematic means of communication to win the understanding and support it must have from the community it serves. To communicate effectively with the community, there also must be effective communication within the school system.

> ***"If a school system and school board are to be successful for any period of time, they must realize that communication is part of any accountability program."***
> ***—Board member, Idaho***

There are numerous reasons boards should pay attention to and formalize their efforts to communicate. They can be summarized in terms of four key factors:

- ○ The need to be accountable.
- ○ The board's dual role of representing both the schools and the community.
- ○ The need to grasp and influence public opinion about the direction and function of public education.
- ○ The board's moral and legal obligation to communicate the reasons for its actions and the way the schools operate.

Being accountable

The moment you make your victory speech (or accept your appointment to the board), you step into a world that demands accountability.

You are accountable to the state government that gives the board its powers. You are accountable to the courts. Primarily, you are accountable to the public for spending tax money and for the public education provided to children.

If there is one compelling reason that school boards must communicate clearly with their multiple constituen-

> ***"You are in much the same position as the members of a corporate board. They must provide information to their shareholders and so must school boards."***
> ***—Board member, Louisiana***

"It is up to the board to act as a filter; to interpret for the public what the administration is doing and to interpret for the administration what the public wants for its kids."
—Board member, Nevada

"People expect the board to keep them informed, even if they have to be force-fed."
—Board member, Tennessee

"Being a board member is like being a juggler who seeks to pull concensus out of balancing the views expressed by the various special interests operating in both the schools and community."
—Board member, Louisiana

cies, it is that to operate effectively within the public trust, they must have the public trust. Public trust is, in part, a product of looking into your community, finding out what the citizens want, opening clear channels of communication between the community and its schools, and using this two-way process to develop programs that serve the schools and give the public what it wants. This process is also the key to maintaining public support for a strong public education program in the face of competing demands for limited resources.

Serving as a conduit

A board has two roles and a mandate to represent two major publics. Just as your responsibilities go both ways—to the schools and to the community—so must your communication. As "insiders" to both communities, board members take on the added responsibility of being the conduit through which information flows from one group to the other and back again.

Is it reasonable to expect any school board to effectively communicate at all times with an extensive, changing, and growing list of individuals and groups? Of course! But effective communication does not require you to carry on the same intensity of communication with *all* groups at *all* times. It does require, however, that you have a policy which provides for access to the board by all groups. It is also reasonable to expect the board to step up the tempo of communication when it is clear that the public does not have adequate information or holds negative attitudes toward school programs.

Putting public opinion in perspective

Another reason boards must communicate is to keep public opinion in perspective. Public opinion can make or break a board and a district. In addition to purely local events and circumstances, public opinion in your community is also influenced by national public opinion polls, network news and public affairs programming, and other views presented in the media.

You will need to keep abreast of national opinion trends, as well as other news events related to education and report these to your community. The headline-grabbing issues such as back-to-basics, desegregation, drug abuse, collective bargaining, classroom violence, and vandalism may not always be the subjects that concern your community but, by being aware of these issues, you can integrate them with local concerns. Good communication will help you maintain a focus on which local issues are of paramount concern to the community, as well as how much national issues and opinions are reflected in local public opinion.

Communication as an obligation

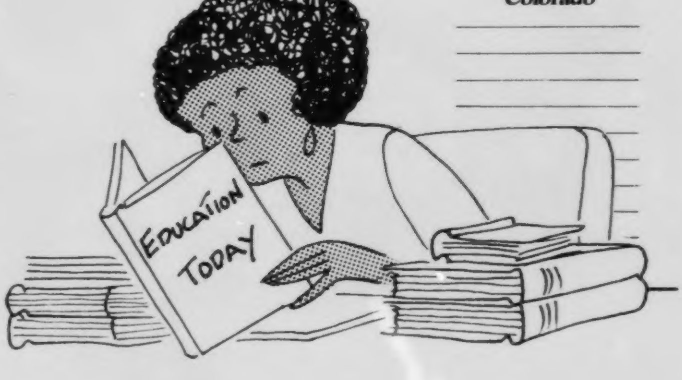
The *moral* responsibility for effective communication rests squarely with the local school board. Nobody is in a better position to counter criticism, to tell the positive side of your schools' story, to explain the policies and functions of public education, and to fight for public support of local control than *you are.*

Once you and your board colleagues step outside the board room, what you say and do is part of your obligation. If you fail to listen to the views of your fellow citizens, show indifference to their concerns, and neglect to provide them the opportunity to interact with you on topics relating to your board service, then you are not living up to the trust that you accepted when you took office.

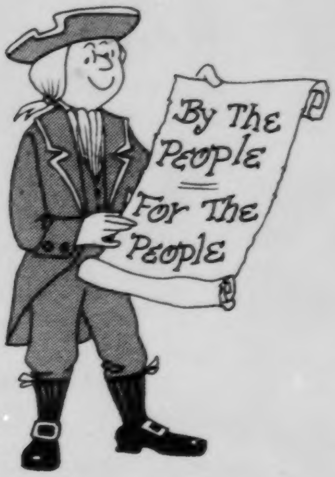
The board's *legal* obligation to communicate is more cut and dried. A school board is legally required to conduct its business in open and public meetings (except for legally excluded executive matters). By law, the board must provide for open discussion of all business before the board and for public input in addressing those matters.

"School board members have the greatest influence on what people think of schools, because they have the power to set policies that demand communication, and they can allocate resources to good communication."
—School administrator, Maryland

"Our credibility would take care of itself if we'd just ask three things: 'What are we doing?' 'Why are we doing it?' and 'What difference does it make?' When we answer those questions for the community—inside and outside the board room—we have few, if any, problems with credibility or support."
—Board member, Colorado



The board's role in communication



"The first step in developing a written school board policy is to inventory the district's current communication system. The policy must address itself to the district's communication system or it will be vague and disfunctional in its application." —Executive director, NSBA

As early as the American Revolution, the citizens of this country made known their belief that the *power* to govern is derived from the *consent* of the governed. In a nutshell, this by-and-for-the-people mandate fosters the board's dual role of representation: representing the community to the schools and the schools to the community.

School board members and school administrators are facing increasing demands from concerned citizens who want to know what is going on in the schools. In some states, legislatures have mandated more citizen involvement in decisions which affect the schools. Whatever the various causes for the public's increased desire for information and participation, the net result is a need for better communication between the schools and the public.

Written policy is key

To ensure that the communication between the school system and the public goes both ways, the board must define the process clearly in a written policy.

A good communication policy does more than outline the procedure by which your board gives notice of actions and provides information about the schools. It is also your board's guarantee to the community and the schools that it is committed to an ongoing, open flow of communication.

Other boards prefer to go beyond this brief statement of philosophy. They include specific items in their policies in order to reduce the chances of misinterpretation, head off misunderstandings, restrain impulsive action, and provide a more precise framework for making communication decisions.

"Written policies are the basic communication bond of the school board with the public and the employees." —Board member, California

How your board chooses to state its policy is not nearly as important as *stating* it. Above all else, the board's policy statement is its official commitment to effective school-community relations. It likewise puts on the record the board's belief that the community's role in effective communication is no less important than the schools' role.

Perhaps nothing you will do toward becoming a better board member will be more important than participating in devising the district's policy on communication. There isn't any guarantee that your board's policy will determine how effectively you master the finer points of boardsmanship, but you can be sure that it will have everything to do with the public awareness of your schools and your publics' perceptions of how effective you are at board service.

What does a policy do for you?

Generally, a policy on communication provides the same benefits and involves the same procedures as any other major policy decision. In addition, it will:

- Reinforce your commitment to other policies, since effective communication will result in a broader distribution and greater awareness of all of your board's policy decisions.
- Provide the framework to ensure the two-way flow of information between the schools and the community.
- Provide the basis for the administration to work out the nuts-and-bolts details of the total communication program.

"Effective communication is a key to the very legitimacy of an institution in a democratic society. It is a key to good staff morale and to responsiveness. Policy should support this premise. It also should support the allocation of human, material, and financial resources to sustain an effective communication program." —School administrator, Kansas

Policy tips

Your board policy statement can be relatively short and simple. It should clearly state what is to be done, the reasons for doing it, and the board's commitment to these goals.

It might open with a declaration relating to the desirability and necessity of two-way communication. It should firmly acknowledge the responsibility of the board, the administration, and the school community for providing leadership and promoting cooperation and communication between the school district and the community. Many boards find that this kind of policy aptly expresses their commitment to community relations, while allowing the administration flexibility to work out the mechanics of the program.

Beyond policy: Your continuing role

It is important to remember that the board's role in effective communication extends well beyond the limits of its policy book. The board's continuing role as a communicator should include:

- *Outreach and publicity,* including use of the media, board notices and minutes, action summaries, and other board publications.
- *Public participation,* including volunteerism, school organizations, and special advisory committees.
- *Public activities* involving board members with staff, students, and community organizations.
- *Relationships* with governmental, educational, and other agencies, other school districts, state and national associations, civic groups, and the business community.

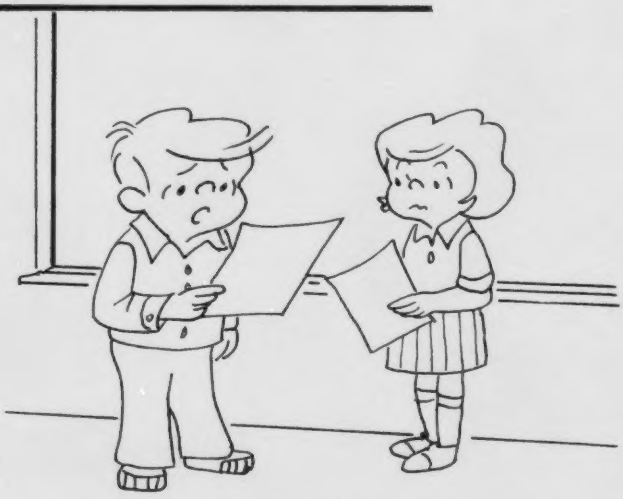
The size and educational priorities of any school district will affect the extent to which each of these elements is emphasized in the board's policy and the district's community relations program. Your district's total communication effort will be only as good as you and your colleagues on the board insist that it be. If you want effective community relations, then make communication a matter of policy.

TIPS FOR WRITING COMMUNICATION POLICY

While policies differ from district to district, a policy statement on school community and public relations might include:

- The board's concern for an ongoing, open, two-way communication program.
- The areas with which the program will deal.
- The responsibilities of school personnel.
- A specific policy on the media.
- An explanation of how board meetings are run and how citizens can participate, contribute, and make suggestions.
- A statement on the individual and collective roles of board members.
- Guidelines for citizen committees and other citizen advisory groups.
- Guidelines for district publications.

Elements of an effective communication program



"How can our school board talk about effective communication with broccoli on the school lunch menu?"

"Public relations should not be used only as a spare tire (only in emergencies) or as a deodorizer (to clear the air)." —Board member, Rhode Island

As a member of a board of education, you will find that your communication needs and priorities will shift from day to day and from circumstance to circumstance.

Whether your school district has the most sophisticated, multi-media approach to communication or no formal communication program at all, communication between your board and your schools and community occurs daily. No matter how elaborate or spartan your district's program may be, you're sending someone clear messages every day. With that in mind, it simply doesn't make sense not to provide for a planned, systematic, two-way process for communication.

Communication tools: a working exercise

When a district addresses a communication program, it shouldn't fall into the trap of thinking that community relations is just press agentry, publicity, public affairs, propaganda, or institutional advertising.

"Every school district has a communication system, regardless of whether it is called that or not. It consists of all of the communication that goes out of the district offices, including the school board meeting agenda and minutes, newsletters, job announcements, annual or periodic reports, press releases, press conferences, film strips, cassettes, reports of the superintendent, and school board member reports and memoranda, to mention but a few."
—Executive director, NSBA

"Our school district has at least 66 ways to communicate with our public and staff, but the most important point is matching what they want to know with how we tell them. That's the key to effective communication."
Superintendent, Ohio

The elements of an effective communication program include news media relations, school publications, brochures and pamphlets, topical magazines, and personal contacts. The board meeting (where your visibility is highest), slide presentations, films on your schools, speaking engagements, school functions, coffee klatches, PTA meetings, surveys, telephone calls, letters, direct mail campaigns, award programs, in-service training, open houses, work with committees, student-parent exchange programs, back-to-school nights, and publication of the lunch menus and school calendar are also important components.

All of these items are widely used and often recommended by any number of school districts and school public relations specialists. However, to try to develop your list into a definitive roster might take years. There are literally thousands of ways to communicate. From this very broad view, then, any time you find the means to—in the words of the telephone company—"reach out and touch someone," you should be aware that your board and district have almost limitless means of getting your message across.

Simplified elements

For simplicity's sake, an effective communication program can be considered to have four basic elements. All four must be taken into account if a communication program is to be effective:

○ A policy commitment.
○ A provision for internal (school) communications.
○ A component for external (community) communications.
○ A commitment of funds.

A policy commitment is your basis for effective communication. You need to communicate in two directions—within the schools and with your constituents in the community at large.

No money, no formal program

Once a communication policy and internal and external networks are in place, you have three key ingredients for an effective program. But like any functional school program, the communication program must be funded. Whether your board opts to have an administrative department of communication or delegates the communication functions to the superintendent, it will be necessary—at bare minimum—to provide such line items as office space; capital equipment such as a typewriter, furniture and, possibly, a camera and other communication equipment; printing, postage, and a telephone.

Budgeting and getting what you pay for

Allocation of budget resources to a communication program is an essential companion to the board's policy commitment to communicate. Your board will have a hard time convincing the cynics that its policy of full and open communication between the schools and the public is serious unless its actions include providing the resources to fund an effective program.

Like so many other aspects of board service, the board's financial commitment to communication will depend on many local variables. How much is spent, and what is purchased for the program, is something for the board and the superintendent or the communication director to work out.

The board shouldn't assume that there just isn't any money in the budget for a communication program. Whether you recognize it or not, you're already spending in this area. The question is, are you getting your money's worth? A very small investment for salary and materials can make sure the program is well managed.

One approach to deciding how much is appropriate for your district is to look at your needs. With your administration, form a small group of educators and citizens, and ask them to report on what communication channels and activities they believe are necessary. Then put cost factors on these as you try to build a decent program.

If your board fails to budget sufficiently, it has lost one of the four basic elements of an effective program, and the other three elements will suffer. *Example:* The lack of a good internal communication program can cost plenty. If the board and its employees don't communicate effectively, the long-term result can be militancy, growing inflexibility, administrator unions, the organizational search for employee power and control at the bargaining table, increased grievances, and even strikes.

The same holds true of relationships between the board and the community. Budget, policy, and two-way communication with your two major publics are essential for achieving effective communication.

"Good public relations is the result of good policies, but don't forget the personnel and financial support necessary to implement these policies."
—School administrator, Nevada

"Public relations needs a budget. Even in times of lids and cutbacks, that budget is worthy of every dollar you're putting into it and should be protected."
—Superintendent, Massachusetts

"Effective communication: coordinating and bringing into alignment perceptions of educational purposes held by educators, school boards, citizens, parents, teachers, and students."
—An official, Pennsylvania Department of Education

"Every communication program should include a four-step process: research, plan, communicate, and evaluate."
—Executive staff member, AASA

BOARD MEMBER COMMUNICATION: DOS AND DON'TS

School districts throughout the United States have developed communication programs. An examination of the elements of these programs provides a handy checklist for board members to use as a guide for handling their communication responsibilities:

○ Set a policy and budget for communication.
○ Hire a communication director or assign the communication function to a competent staff member.
○ Include communication in staff in-service programs.
○ Answer all correspondence.
○ Acknowledge visitors at meetings.
○ Follow through on questions and concerns.
○ Avoid surprises between board members and the superintendent.
○ Keep professional and other staff members informed.
○ Have a regular newsletter to staff, the community, and special groups.
○ Don't over-react to situations.
○ Don't hastily make or change policy to meet a crisis.
○ Prepare information for the media.
○ Provide a press table at meetings.
○ Keep an "open door" policy.
○ Be diplomatic.
○ Visit schools regularly.
○ Become part of a speakers bureau for your schools.
○ Appear on local television and radio shows.
○ Visit local news media editors.
○ Send students and employees letters citing their accomplishments.
○ Keep news clippings on media coverage of your school system.
○ Recognize the contributions to the schools by citizens.
○ Keep in touch with constituents by phone or mail.
○ Conduct an annual attitude survey.
○ Take random samplings of opinion on "hot" or emerging issues.
○ Develop a "Welcome" brochure for board meeting visitors.
○ Introduce yourself to people at board meetings.
○ Be visible at school and civic events.
○ Turn people on with your own enthusiasm.

"Miss Wilkins, about your in-service training module on effective communication . . . ."

The value of a communication director

> ***"It's one thing to be a* Public Information Officer *and quite another to be the* Public Relations or Communication Director. *Public information is just one part of the public relations process. The board should look to this important communication 'executive' for advice on strategy development and issues management." —School administrator, Colorado***

One of the decisions your board is likely to make when considering the scope and budgetary requirements of a communication program is whether a public relations or communication director is a wise choice for your district. The experiences of school districts of all sizes indicate that including such a staff position as part of the management team is a valuable resource and a key element in an effective program of community relations.

Someone other than your superintendent

The superintendent might seem a likely person to handle the district's communication functions. However, if you think about the sheer volume of various types of communication, it's obvious the district's chief executive will need to delegate a major part of these duties to someone else. One obvious possibility is a communication director—and that director's support staff.

Directly responsible to the superintendent

A communication director should be answerable directly to the superintendent and should have full oversight of all communication functions. If your district doesn't have a communication director and wants to hire one, the board and superintendent should take a look at the goals its policy incorporates and use them to frame a job description. Unless there's some legal obstacle in your district, it is quite acceptable for this job description to include duties relating to the day-to-day conduct of school business *plus* some responsibilities directly related to the board.

What to look for

Until recently, it was difficult to find qualified individuals to serve as school communication directors. In recent years, however, organizations such as the National School Public Relations Association have done much to enhance the understanding of the profession. In many colleges, school communication is being addressed in the curriculum for public relations.

What your district should look for is a person who has the following traits:

- ○ A degree in communication, if possible.
- ○ Some experience with the complexities of public education.
- ○ Written and oral communication skills.
- ○ Skill in using survey instruments.
- ○ Intelligence and good judgment.
- ○ Sensitivity to the needs of many people.
- ○ An intimate knowledge of the workings of the news media.
- ○ Some basic understanding of graphic arts and printing.
- ○ Possibly some knowledge or skill with audio and visual equipment.
- ○ Some degree of civic visibility and involvement within the community.
- ○ Ability to develop communication strategy and to serve as issues' counsel.

If you can find such a person, the dividends will far outweigh the investment. As a board member from Michigan notes: "It is absolutely essential that someone be responsible for setting up and maintaining the communication system schools must have today. I think it is best to hire a trained professional to work full or part-time on the job. The public will no longer tolerate even hints that public officials are hiding behind one excuse or another, including lack of money, in order to avoid providing them with reasonable information about their schools."

That view was seconded by a superintendent who said, "School districts generally must budget more money for community relations," and suggested that part of those expenditures should be directed toward the hiring of a communication executive.

Not all districts can afford to hire a fully trained, professional communication director. If yours can't, you would still do well to find a key communicator to shoulder this load. That might be a faculty member, an administrator, a volunteer from the community, a graduate student, a moonlighting reporter, or a consultant. Remember, if you are going to use one of these alternatives to establishing an administrative position, make certain that the person your district selects has a solid background in public relations and fulfills as many of the qualifications listed in the professional job description for communication director as possible.

> ***"More effort must be given to public relations by people who are trained, interested in, and capable of communicating with people." —Superintendent, Pennsylvania***

Communicating as a board

"Staying in the background is not an easy assignment for some boards (or some board members), but public relations is primarily an administrative responsibility."
—Board member, Tennessee

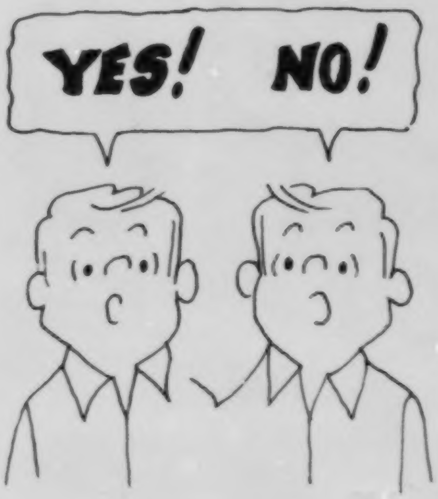
In the late '70s, one of the popular remedies for closing the "communication gap" was "coming up front." If your board has made a firm policy commitment to two-way communication and has either participated in or delegated the structuring of its communication program, it has been as up front as it needs to be. It has met its *major* responsibility, from which will stem others. One of these is the responsibility to allow the administration to implement the policy.

Keeping communication a priority

With your written communication policy in hand, there are a number of things you and your colleagues can do to make certain your communication program will work:

Make certain your communication policy clearly spells out who is to do what, delegate appropriately, and monitor the implementation. Many school boards find it useful to have the superintendent provide regular reports on district communication efforts.

Appoint a designated spokesman for the board. It may seem curious to assign an individual to meet a collective responsibility, but having one person speak for the board will eliminate confusion about the board's message. This can be especially important in dealing with the news media and in meeting the need for clear, non-conflicting communication during a crisis.



There should be one spokesman for the board.

This function should not be confused with the appointment of a communication director for the district. Although some boards do include the spokesman's role in the job description of the communication director, the function of a board-designated spokesman is separate and apart from oversight for the mechanics of the district's communication program. One is a spokesman for the *board,* while the other speaks for the *school system* as a whole.

Identify your publics. You cannot communicate effectively if you do not know to whom you are speaking.

Provide the means by which your publics can offer feedback to the board. As you use tools of communication, such as board meetings, publications, and surveys, make sure you provide for feedback from your publics.

Take the time periodically to assess where you are. A little confession is good for the soul, and if your board and administration are going to work well with each other—and with your internal and external publics—you should provide time to evaluate your progress towards implementing the communication program.

One of the common problems that arises in school board communication is boards usurping duties or functions that rightfully belong to other participants in the plan. This might occur through a breach of protocol, individual impatience, ignoring the proper chain of command, or because of some oversight or structural weakness in the communication plan. In any of these cases, a proper program evaluation will help to identify and resolve the problem.

In fulfilling your role, it is not enough to just know *what* to do: You and your colleagues must also know *how* to communicate effectively.

Communicating with the superintendent

Since the board should delegate many of the specifics of its program, the superintendent also plays a key role in the communication process. He is in a position to enhance or block the flow of communication through every level

"You and your colleagues will be constantly in contact with members of the community; teachers, administrators, and other members of the school family; with other political and governmental entities; and with the news media. Individually and collectively, you may well find that your communication does more than simply cut across clearly defined lines; it may actually obscure the point at which you can answer, 'Where do I leave off and we, the board, begin?'"
—Board member, Virginia

> ***"Our community is encouraged to bring before the school board issues and concerns which can be most properly addressed only by the school board."***
> ***—Superintendent, Connecticut***

of the administrative team and beyond. Therefore, the board first must be certain that its communication with the superintendent is effective, and that he also places a high priority on systematic, two-way communication.

Communicating at board meetings

You and your colleagues have many ways of communicating with the members of your community. Regardless of the degree of interest demonstrated by your staff or community, the most visible of all board communication will occur in the board room. Even if your board is accustomed to looking out over a sea of empty chairs, what happens in the board room will be communicated to the public.

Your community might discover what happens in your board room when a new policy is implemented, or when the announcement of the closing of a school is made. Community members may get their information from a teacher or a neighbor who attended the meeting, or read about it in the local newspaper. Regardless, communication about your board meetings will occur, and you should approach your meetings as the open forums of communication that they are.

The opportunities for using the board room as an effective staging area for communication go well beyond oral dialogue with your board's constituency. Here are some ideas that have worked to help numerous boards:

- Have the board president make a point of welcoming all patrons to "*their* board meeting." This is positive reinforcement of public ownership of the schools and creates a sense of involvement for those in attendance.
- Have the district's communication department compile a "Welcome Booklet" that offers information about the schools and, particularly, an explanation of how the board works.
- Acknowledge the attendance of dignitaries or first-time attendees in the audience.
- Schedule meetings to include administrative reports on one specific aspect of the district's program, such as special education or the music program. Often, news media attending the meetings expand these briefings into highly positive community features.
- Turn the presentation of citizen committee reports into media events by arranging to have them presented to the board as part of a regular or special meeting.
- Schedule routine coffee breaks and invite patrons to come forward with questions or to informally discuss board actions.
- Structure the agenda to provide for board discussion of each item to be followed with a few minutes of public comment. This is a controlled, but highly useful, approach for encouraging public participation.

Communicating through publications

Another highly visible form of communication is district publications. If they are properly planned, packed with relevant information, clearly written, and well designed, internal and external publications are concrete evidence that you and your colleagues are serious about providing information about the schools.

Publications is an area that clearly demands delegation. Whether printed on a gravure press or mimeographed; whether written by the superintendent or a third-grade class; whether a 64-page "tell all" document or a single-page letter; publications require a budget, planning, and coordination, all of which should be managed by a communication professional.

If your district has a communication director, that's the logical choice. But even the smallest district can afford to hire a consultant to handle publications. You might have to shop around, but it is likely your area's university system, local newspaper, or business community can provide a low-cost consultant. You might even find a specialist in the community who would volunteer. Regardless, your board should complete its responsibilities in this area early in the game—while it is developing its communication policy and budget. Then, it's time to step into the background.

You do need to be aware that district publications range well beyond the common monthly or quarterly newsletter. They include the board's policy manual, employee handbooks and newsletters, student handbooks, informational and "sales pitch" brochures, permanent copies of board minutes, and research and advisory reports. An assessment of the district's publications

"Do you have a board paper? We found that 70 percent of the people in our community had no children in school and, worse, only 19 percent subscribed to the local newspaper. We reach them with our board newspaper, for which the board provides input and the superintendent does the writing."
—Board member, Minnesota

"When parents really know what's going on in the schools, they support education. Informed parents and citizens become strong allies."
—Superintendent, Connecticut

should be included in your evaluation of the total community relations program.

Although artistic considerations are important to the success of any publication, far more important is what your publications say. Evaluation should be heavily weighted toward reviewing whether district publications meet board goals and reach the intended audiences. When evaluating, your board can be guided by the precept that *public* is the first word in publications. If your publications do little more than stroke the egos of the board and school administration to the exclusion of other publics, you should consider this *puff*, not the ingredients of effective communication.

Communicating via citizen committees

The story goes that the young reporter burst into the newsroom with a hearty, "Stop the presses! Lindy just flew the Atlantic solo!" To which, the venerable editor replied, "Big deal. Let's see him do it with a committee."

Suffice it to say that the editor was not destined for school board service. In the two-way scheme of board communication, citizen advisory committees can provide immediate and useful feedback to a board. Some board members go as far as to say that their citizen advisory committees are the backbone of their communication efforts.

In order to effectively direct the district, a board has to have its finger on the community's pulse. What the citizens may or may not know about the schools, what they may want or need to know, and what they are thinking and doing are all key ingredients to breaking down barriers to communication and ensuring that the board does not operate in a vacuum.

Many boards find that the support they gain comes from a certain degree of empathy committee members have with school problems once they have become closer to them. "Committees help people understand the complexity of our problems," says one board member. "They learn that you can't just change things over night or shift funds from one area of the budget to another."

Communicating through other citizen groups

Although boards pilot the affairs of the schools, they cannot fly solo. Here are some other ways boards are communicating with and through groups of citizens:

Key communicators. Too often, news about the schools is passed by word of mouth. To overcome this handicap, many districts identify key persons in the community who can be counted upon to disseminate factual information. Districts have found the *key communicator* network especially effective for dispelling rumors in times of crisis or controversy.

Home and school associations. Many boards keep open channels with organizations such as the PTA/PTO, student council, and booster clubs. These groups have a readily apparent interest in school affairs, and many boards find them useful sources of feedback.

Says a board member from New York: "PTA's usually plan informational programs, enrichment activities for students, and generally try to develop a good working relationship between the home and the school. They conduct fund-raising activities to buy additional equipment for the schools or to use in any manner the group chooses. Some schools have one-on-one tutoring programs and other special projects that vary from year to year."

Volunteers. Not all groups of citizens that interract with school boards are large. School volunteers, individually or working together, also can provide valuable feedback to your board. Often, it's just a question of soliciting the information or assistance your board needs, which is usually done through the administration. Properly informed, volunteers can be effective advocates for school programs, budgets, and board policies, since they are perceived as being outside the regular advocacy groups.

Communicating through surveys

Your district is *most* likely to hear from the vocal minority or, as one board member put it, "from the people who are aggressive enough to make a phone call." So you will want to tap mechanisms that provide feedback from a cross section of the community. Surveys can do the job.

The cost of surveying can be formidable or, depending on the level of precision your board desires from its survey, can be financed on a shoestring. If you and your colleagues plan to use a survey and wish to get the most out of the time, effort, and money the district

"If you get interested people to participate, they gain information and filter it out to the community. This brings the school board support and some measure of success."
—Board member, Indiana

"Key communicators have alerted us to potential problems, have enabled us to correct false rumors before they became widespread, and have given us a way to counteract misinformation in the press. We also have a way to find out what parents want to know and to disseminate information about it."
—Board member, Texas

"Our committees helped convince our senior citizens and other non-parents of the need for a building program. Once you get a committee's initial endorsement, they won't work against you—even if they later get cold feet."
—Board member, Wyoming

"Our district surveys everybody. We survey parents, voters, teachers, custodians, students, taxpayers, school neighbors, newsmen, and senior citizens. What we learn is often invaluable."
—Board member, Wisconsin

will commit to the project, you will have to do a little homework. You can do this with the help of the superintendent, the district's communication director, or a paid communication consultant.

First, your board should have a clear fix on what it wants to find out. If the purpose of the survey is to gauge district-wide opinion, then the sample your board selects must be representative of the wider audience. The size of the sample should not necessarily be proportionate to the size of the community. Consult a text on polling which will give, in table format, the percentages for error for various sizes of samples and guidelines for choosing a valid statistical sample for the survey.

There is no value in conducting a low-cost survey if it will not produce the desired results. A volunteer-based school survey, with hand tabulation, might cost less than $2,000. The use of an outside professional survey team can be much higher. Thus, if you and your colleagues look at the budget and discover district funds won't stretch far enough to meet your objectives, you will either have to weigh the benefits against the cost and decide to find the money to proceed, or narrow the focus of what you are seeking to learn.

"Many a pain in a school board's side has been relieved by asking a disgruntled citizen to share in district problem solving."
—Superintendent, Missouri

In any event, not until you have determined what you wish to discover, how many people must respond to make the survey credible, and how much you have to spend, can you answer the other questions involved in preparing a survey, such as:

- How will we use the results?
- How will the statistics be compiled and evaluated?
- What human resources are needed?
- What kind of media should be used (Interviews, telephone, door-to-door campaign, or written mail-in)?
- Which outside consultant or agency should be used, if any?
- How long should the survey take?
- How will the results be publicized?

All of these items must be taken into account if a board is to get its money's worth out of a survey. And although all of these components are important to the success of the exercise, the last item—publicizing the results—may be the most important.

Your district can publicize the survey before, during, and after it is conducted. In addition to survey results, the media will want to know *when* the survey is to be conducted and *why*; *how* it will be conducted; *who* will be surveyed; and *what* the board intends to do with the results. Surveys can be aired as public service announcements, and notes about the survey can be sent home with students.

An added benefit: When surveys are publicized, the survey responses will increase along with public awareness.

As you examine some of the different kinds of surveys school districts use presented here, keep in mind that your board's purpose should be two-way communication.

The written questionnaire. By far the most popular survey tool used by school boards, the written questionnaire, requires a degree of artistry. Although the procedure followed in this survey technique is relatively simple, the skills required to gain the maximum benefits from the survey require study and practice.

The purposes of the questionnaire should be fully explained to the participants. One of the major drawbacks to many written questionnaires is that they require time for the participant to wade through the questions and develop a thoughtful response. A clear explanation of why the district is taking the survey can go a long way toward reducing the number of surveys that are not returned.

The wording of survey questions is important. Improper phrasing or "posturing" of questions can render the whole sample invalid. Questions should:

- Be simple, concise, and unambiguous.
- Be put in language people can understand.
- Be structured to elicit the specific information the district needs.
- Not be leading. *Example:* "Don't you think it's about time the district had an adult education program on a year-round basis?"
- Be listed individually, one at a time. Don't ask, "Do you do this…*or*…do you do that?" in the same question.
- Be pretested on a small group to identify areas of misunderstanding.

The personal interview. Personal interviews are not commonly used by school districts, but they can be useful. The percentage of returns will be unusually high, and the information received is likely to be more accurate than that obtained from other survey methods.

"Openness and honesty should be the basis of all board and district communication." —Board member, Ohio

Expanded questioning can stem from the initial question and response, and any misunderstandings about the questions can be readily clarified.

Personal interviews, however, can be a problem:

- ○ The size of the sample may not be valid for community-wide assessment.
- ○ A great deal of time is required to complete a valid questioning sample.
- ○ The number of people needed to do the questioning is higher.
- ○ The level of training the questioners must receive is higher.
- ○ The tabulation of the results is likely to be more cumbersome.

When interviewers are used, they should:

- ○ Be familiar with all questions to be asked.
- ○ When interviewing, ask all the same questions and follow the exact wording of the questions.
- ○ Note exact responses when asking questions requiring expanded comments.
- ○ Dress to suit the audience being surveyed in face-to-face interviews.
- ○ Have at least one training exercise before interviewing anyone.

Survey questions should be the same, whether they are put in a written format, or used as the basis for a telephone interview or a personal interview.

Which of these techniques will best suit your board's needs? Again, that depends on what you want to know, how large a sample you need to find it out, and how much money and time you have.

How surveys fit into the process of communicating as a board may be best expressed by two board members from Virginia.

Says the first: "It's easy to get too far out in front of things. Through the year, you will hear from the extremes at both ends of an issue, but will hear very little from those in the middle. Random surveys will give people a chance to express their views and can provide the board with a more balanced view of the public's opinions."

Adds the second board member: "You have to listen, weigh the facts, and indicate to the people what the facts are. You can't simply rely on input from what may be well-meaning, but ill-informed people."

Their message is clear. The board still has to make policy decisions. Surveys, citizen advisory committees, and other groups can play an important part in the decisions you and your colleagues will make. They will provide you with two-way communication and visible evidence that the board has done its homework.

IDENTIFYING YOUR PUBLICS

In less time than it takes to brew a cup of coffee, you can easily develop a list of the components that make up the publics you serve in your dual role as a representative. Consider your list a working draft, for it will change many times as public interest rises and ebbs with the flow of the business before the board. Here's a sample list:

The School (Internal)

Other board members
Superintendent
Top district administrators
School principals
Central office personnel
Consultants
Teachers
Counselors
Students
Custodians
School secretaries
Food service employees
Technical people
Coaches
Teacher aides/volunteers
School bus drivers

Special Constituencies

State school boards association
National School Boards Association
Education associations/unions
Parent-teacher organizations
School booster clubs
Student councils
Bond election committees
Neighboring school boards

The Community (External)

Parents
Non-parent taxpayers
Civic organizations
Reporters (media)
Neighborhood improvement groups
City council
County government
State government
Federal government
Business community
Minority organizations
Recreation organizations
Religious groups/church groups
Activists
Construction companies
Architects
Vendors of school products
Police, health, and fire departments

Sobering thought for the day: Once you have completed your list, you will find that you are actually already in communication with many of the groups on it. Your conduct in board meetings and the actions your board takes are sending these people messages that either enhance their knowledge or reinforce their ignorance. To ensure they are getting the right messages, your board must have a clear policy for communication.

WHAT WILL A SURVEY DO FOR YOUR BOARD?

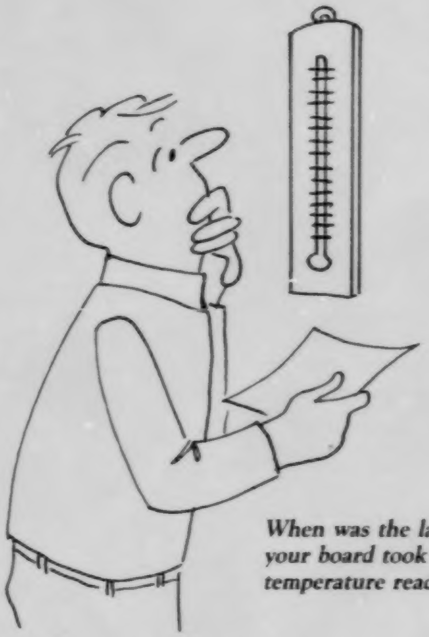
Surveys can be a board's avenue to accountability, help a board demonstrate its interest in community views, and ensure that communication flows to and from a board. Here are some particular ways you and your colleagues will find surveys of value:

For improving public relations. A survey says to your publics that their opinions have merit and that the board believes two-way communication benefits the community and the schools.

For temperature-reading. A survey can provide your board with a "testing of the water" on key issues. It also can help your board time its decisions to the ebb and flow of public support. *Example:* One school board's survey indicated the district was not, in the words of one of its members, "into the red far enough" for its community to support a bond issue. The board used these findings as the basis for creating greater awareness of its financial dilemma. A year later, a subsequent study confirmed that the issue would pass with significant public support.

To test public perception. A survey can help your board identify areas of public concern to which it can respond before little problems grow into large crises. It can serve as a ready tool for planning, for structuring goal assessments, or building a network of citizen committees.

To find a focal point. When your board addresses a special issue, individuals or groups with a special interest will offer their views. Unfortunately, most of the dialogue will come from the extremes on both sides of the issue. A survey can give your board a much better reading of both ends and the middle. The survey results can act as both a defense against radical arguments and as a guideline for board action. *Example:* A board in a large metropolitan district was confronted by two groups: one demanding sex education; one opposing it. Both groups claimed representation of the majority of public sentiment. The board's survey indicated a very clear middle ground which allowed the board defensible action that defused a potentially explosive issue.



When was the last time your board took a temperature reading?

TIPS FOR USING SURVEY CONSULTANTS

When using an outside firm or consultant to conduct a survey of public opinion, here are some ideas:

- ○ Have the superintendent or his administrative designee be a part of the survey team and serve as an impartial liaison between the outside members of the team and your board and other members of the school family.
- ○ Acquaint all school personnel and the community with *why* the survey is being conducted and what kinds of actions the board might take after the survey is completed.
- ○ Request reading (briefing) materials on the survey and how it works, so your professional staff will be aware of the information-gathering techniques being used in the survey.
- ○ Write into your agreement provisions for interim visits and reports by the survey team to keep the board and the school management team up to date on the progress of the survey.
- ○ Insist that the board determines, or has a major voice in determining, the amount of time the survey will take—from start to finish. Avoid hurrying up or dragging out the final report of survey results.
- ○ Make sure you won't be left holding an interpretive document you do not understand. Establish, as part of your schedule, time for a systematic review of and briefing on the results of the survey.
- ○ Insist that an integral part of the survey will be a provision or system by which your district can periodically update the findings of the survey.

SOLVING MINI-CRISES BY BEING A CONDUIT

The nature of your dual role as a board member may very well lead you to believe your decision-making options are limited to two approaches:

- ○ Taking an action the administration seeks, but the public opposes.
- ○ Taking an action the public seeks, but the administration opposes.

The simple truth is that very few decisions requiring you to weigh one side of your representative role against the other will be clearcut. As the conduit of information between the schools and the community, you and your board colleagues often will be working in the muddled gray areas of compromise.

You may find yourself basing your decision on a course of action that involves elements of what each group sought but that, in fact, is not what either was seeking. Don't worry about it. You were elected or appointed for the specific purpose of making the tough decisions on policy and, as long as you are communicating in both directions, both sides should understand that compromise is a part of the process.

Here are a few examples of this type of tough decision and how school boards keep two-way communication open between the administration and the public.

In Wisconsin, authority exerted. The information was general. "We sensed dissatisfaction with our graduation requirements when people who spoke or called us started saying our graduates weren't educated as well as they used to be," a board member explains. "The administration redrafted our graduation policy, but did not recommend a competency test. We insisted the competency test be included because we felt it was what the community wanted."

Here, the views of both sides were offered, and the board was able to weigh information leading to a decision to include a competency test.

In Virginia, "Do it this way." When it found itself losing confidence in the coordination of its gifted and talented program, the board got together with the administration and with citizens to draft a new plan which the administration agreed to implement.

"We don't want someone who will scratch when we itch," one board member says of her superintendent. "But there can't always be consensus, and sometimes the board has to take the bull by the horns and say, 'Do it this way.'"

A common problem. No board really relishes confrontation with the administration, but most board members do agree that, at times, direct confrontation is the only choice a board has.

"It was eyeball to eyeball between us and our superintendent," one board member recalls. The issue was to meet a public demand to reduce the administrative staff. The board had to override the superintendent, but it did not usurp the chief executive's duties by telling him which parts of the staff to cut. "I felt my duty was to say, 'I think we should cut staff, period,'" the board member explained.

A Southern board member gives a second example: "Our superintendent was disturbed about how much money we were spending on equal education for the handicapped," he said. "Our state's equal education law was one of the first. The administration was dragging its feet because the state was not insisting on implementation. Our citizens convinced us that equal education was the moral thing to do."

"It's not often we go around our administration," added a midwestern board member. He said his board will occasionally bypass the superintendent's recommendation, but it governs its decisions by its belief that a positive board-superintendent relationship is vital to convincing the professional staff of the district that what the lay people want is both worthwhile and necessary.

These examples should not suggest that the community *always* has its way on policy matters. Just as communication goes both ways, so do the decisions. Most boards that handle these decisions effectively pay close attention to the importance of public trust. They take extra pains to communicate the reasoning behind sensitive decisions to their communities.

In Wisconsin, an unsettled feeling. One board adopted a long-range study that generated public concern over boundary changes. "Community people were unsettled because they felt they hadn't been able to influence the decision," one member recalled.

However, in the process of making its decision, the board preserved opportunities for public participation. It "conducted public hearings, went on the radio, and wrote up *everything,*" the board member said.

"After we heard all the concerns of the parents and taxpayers, we still felt our decision was right."

A veteran says, "Let them speak." "The best thing to do is give people a chance to talk," opined a 12-year veteran from a district of 100,000 students. "Give notice a year before closing a school, and listen to what parent groups have to say. It can be a great deal. If you give them a chance to express their views, you'll find the prospect for public outrage diminished."

Adds another veteran board member, "Policies that are well written can head off problems. If our policies had said that we would review our boundaries yearly, we would not have had the trouble we did."

Conflicts between the board and the community will often be more pronounced than those between the board and administrators. At the community level, emotion often takes over. "We can't fight emotion," one board member said. "We must simply respond with what we feel is right and, hopefully, our feeling is grounded in sound policy."

Another says listen, care. Perhaps the best advice on serving as the conduit of information is that offered by the board member who said, "Don't get caught not listening and not caring." That advice applies to communicating with both of your publics.

Whether "the public" is your neighbor or your superintendent, the rules are the same:

- ○ Communicate with your public.
- ○ Don't do things at the last minute.
- ○ Give people a chance to talk.
- ○ Let the public know that it is *the board's* decision to make.
- ○ Let the chips fall where they may: Make a decision.

Communicating as an individual board member

***"From the moment a person is elected to the school board, the eyes of the community see that person differently."
—Board member, Ohio***

By now, you have probably had one or more of the unique experiences school board service brings. Maybe it was Charlie who called you on the telephone. Nice guy, Charlie. He borrows your lawnmower *and* returns it. You both ride in the same carpool. You're half of a great foursome on the local golf course.

"I just heard about your appointment to the board. Congratulations, old buddy. I know you'll do a fine job."

"Thanks, Charlie. I'll try," you reply.

Charlie isn't even listening. He's talking. "And speaking about doing a good job, when are you guys down there on the board going to do something about the coach? He didn't even let my son try that last field goal! Do you realize that's seven losses in a row? Why, poor Timmy is ashamed to show his face at school . . . ."

Welcome to the world of personal communication

If you haven't already, you are now going to have to master a new art: the art of face-to-face personal communication. It goes with the territory of boardsmanship.

***"When it comes to personal communication, I don't commit myself to action. I'm a good listener; a good laugher; and a big, round file."
—Board member, Colorado***

Foremost, you are going to have to learn that what you say and do—even when you think you're doing or saying something solely for yourself—will have an impact on your school board.

For example, how long would it have taken for a rumor to leak out that the coach's job was in jeopardy if you had replied innocently, "I don't know, Charlie. I guess we'll look into it."

From now until the end of your board service, you will have to develop your skills as a listener; temper your individual views on school matters with the knowledge that you can't speak or make commitments for the whole board; and accept that your only legal power as a board member lies when you cast your vote in the board room.

Communicating as an individual

You can prepare yourself for personal communication by learning:

- How to understand what another person is saying.
- How to identify the cause of problems in communication.
- How to listen to another's feelings.
- How to honestly express your own feelings and change the situation affecting those feelings.
- How to become more effective at problem solving.
- How to resolve clashes of values.

You will handle your personal communication more effectively if you remember that you are an individual *plus* a board member *all the time*, and use a little common sense. The number one rule to observe is to not get caught off guard in any situation in which you will appear to be speaking for the board unless, of course, you have been authorized to do so by the board.

***"You have to get out to the schools. You simply can't do all of your work at the board table. You have to get personally involved in an awareness of what is happening in the schools."
—Board member, Kentucky***

Visiting the schools

School visitation is useful for conveying to the district's internal publics that you are interested in their working environment. Most board members take the time to discuss school business with administrators and staff, but cautions one such visitor: "Talk and listen, but don't get caught up into making commitments. If you must do something, make a note and ask the superintendent to check out your point of interest informally. Don't break the chain of command."

That caution is one of the few basic rules pertaining to school visitations. The other important caveats are:

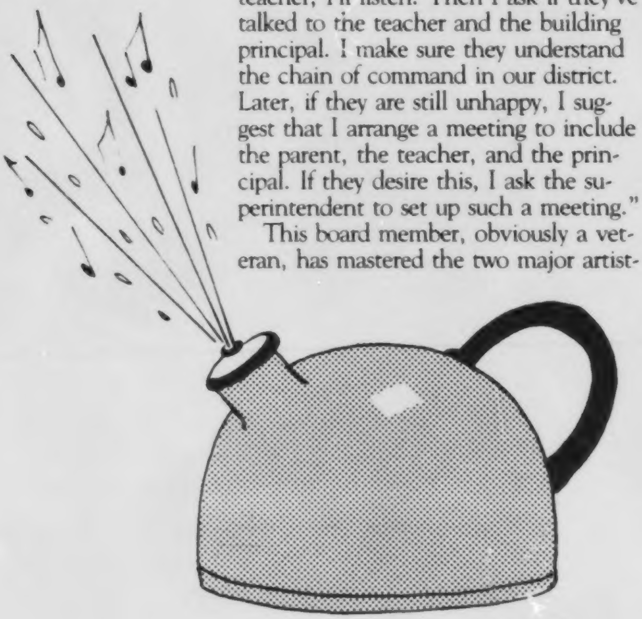
Don't arrive unannounced. Have your superintendent arrange and clear your visit with the building principal.

Remember your status. When visiting alone, you are just one member of the board. Although you have a title and position that may be intimidating to school personnel, your authority in the school during a visit is, in reality, no greater than any other concerned citizen. Don't use your access as a board member to throw your weight around.

Don't disrupt school activities or take faculty and staff away from their work. If you want to ask questions, ask the principal to arrange access to personnel during your initial call. Then he can inform teachers that you will be visiting.

"Because I see a lot of people, I take the time to say to them once in awhile, 'Hey, you know we're having some hard times in the district. How do you feel about some of the decisions we're making right now?' I listen to their views. Feedback like that is invaluable." —Board member, Colorado

"When a patron has difficulty in accepting that his views might be different from mine and those of other patrons, I ask him to come to a meeting where he can see that there is discussion and expression of differing ideas and opinions." —Board member, Ohio



Don't spy and don't pry. By all means, observe what you see around you, but don't spend your time looking into broom closets or over the shoulders of the staff. This kind of activity will stifle, not promote, communication.

If you observe these few common cautions, you will find that the value of school visitations is high. You will be put into closer touch with how your campuses look and operate, and how district employees and students feel about the school system.

If school visitation is one of your most visible actions of communicating with internal publics, then the same can be said of your external contacts and your handling of complaints.

From the moment you took your seat on the board, you undoubtedly noticed an immediate increase in telephone calls and the number of "Charlies" who stop you on the street for a quick chat about some aspect of the school program. These personal contacts, if handled properly, will help you raise your credibility with the people you represent.

That view is supported by an Ohio board member who notes: "The longer I remain on the board, the fewer crisis phone calls I get. The people in our town have learned. They know how I am going to handle a situation. They know I am going to listen, but they know I'm then going to ask them to go through the appropriate channels. For example, if an irate parent calls because a child has had a problem with a teacher, I'll listen. Then I ask if they've talked to the teacher and the building principal. I make sure they understand the chain of command in our district. Later, if they are still unhappy, I suggest that I arrange a meeting to include the parent, the teacher, and the principal. If they desire this, I ask the superintendent to set up such a meeting."

This board member, obviously a veteran, has mastered the two major artistries of handling complaints: the art of listening and the art of handling them at the board level only as a last resort.

There will be those times, of course, when what you hear from your constituents will be valid. You may personally agree. One board member says there are times when he wants to admit, "I know what you're saying. I'm a board member and the same thing has happened to me! It's still happening!" A board member from a western state adds, "There are times I would like to shake the board, the superintendent, and the principal until their faces turn blue."

But these board members have a firm fix on the difference between their board duty and the limits of their individual roles. They do not act individually in a manner which usurps the legitimate functions of the whole board. Instead, they use their individual talents for communicating to direct dissatisfied patrons through the appropriate grievance structure.

As you progress as a board member, you are likely to develop your own style of handling the various complaints that come your way.

The art of listening

Listening to a person's feelings is sometimes an exercise in separating reality from fantasy. In handling complaints, you will often be confronted by a person who is reacting emotionally to what may or may not be a factual stimulus.

Part of the art of listening is to simply let the "tea kettle" blow off its steam. If you let your complainant have his say before you respond, you will often be able to sift out the fact from the fiction and the emotional from the rational. Then with a touch of empathy, you can set the record straight and direct the person through the proper chain of command to resolve the part of the problem that actually has a factual basis.

The old adage, "silence is golden," can also apply to your handling of complaints. At times, "I hear what you are saying," will do more to soothe ruffled feathers than a policy book full of answers.

Learning to listen clearly to what a person is saying takes practice. It is human nature in any confrontation to be thinking of your own response before the other party can complete the process of making a point, but you have to work to overcome this trait.

"I've heard every complaint a board member can hear. I respond to each the same way. First, I listen. Then, if it's a situation that someone else should handle, I direct the complainant to the proper person. But, above all, I try to be honest and I never guarantee anything." —Board member, Alabama

"I don't mind hearing gripes and complaints. It's part of my job. It is a job I asked for and one that I like. I don't remember anyone promising me a rose garden." —Board member, Oklahoma

"The good Lord gave us two ears and one tongue. That should tell us something."
—Board member, Georgia

If your complainant doesn't seem to be offering enough specifics, simply say, "tell me more," and keep listening. You'll be making a show of respect for the person's feelings without being trapped into a commitment for further action.

You will hear many voices during your tenure on the board. Some will be positive; some will be outraged. The one thing all of these voices have in common is the desire to be heard by their representative on the board. Before you can understand these voices and communicate effectively with the persons who raise them, you will have to master the art of listening.

Effective public speaking

There are times when your role as a board member will demand that *you* do the talking.

A school board member is called upon to make numerous speeches—campaign speeches, addresses on the merits of a bond proposal, speeches to the PTA/PTO, and appearances before Kiwanis, Rotary, the chamber of commerce, and other community organizations.

Perhaps no experience in public sector life can be more mind boggling, more terrifying, or more humbling than speaking before a live audience. Nevertheless, spoken communication is a part of the territory of boardsmanship. You simply can't stand on the bank like a timid swimmer testing the water, you have to jump in with both feet and with your eyes wide open.

"It takes time to listen and, on some occasions, it is not convenient. But a board member needs to make the time available and be willing to expend it. It is amazing how people appreciate the opportunity to express themselves."
—Board member, Pennsylvania

Whether you campaigned for your board office or were appointed by someone who campaigned for his office, you certainly are aware of public speaking. You probably have shared the common experience of the speaker who, returning from a banquet, was asked by his wife, "How did your speech go?"

He replied, "Which speech? The one I intended to deliver, the one I did deliver, or the one I delivered so eloquently in the car while driving home?"

You won't have to face that dilemma in the future if you keep in mind that, like the written word, the spoken word should evoke all of the basic components of good communication: research, planning, knowledge of the audience, the framing of a few key points or objectives, and clarity of expression. Additionally, speechmaking involves mastering a few basic mechanics—and that means practice and more practice.

Whole volumes have been compiled on the subject of making speeches. Speaking of his earliest experiences after becoming the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Windsor said, "The more appearances I had to make, the more I came to respect the really first-class speech as one of the highest human accomplishments."

What makes a good speech? *Content. Clarity. Facts.* As a board member, you will be expected to know your facts, to know how to use them, and to know where and how to get them. But you'll find that the effort is not without benefits. It will help you obtain a better grasp on communication as simple as daily conversation. It will help you learn more about your school district. It also will help you in areas beyond the scope of school board service.

"If it's a question of policy or what action the board took, you can speak to that; but you can't speak for the board. You have to say so. And if it's a concern, you can take it back to the board for proper consideration."
—Board member, Ohio

One caution on expressing views contrary to the board's. There is one notable caution inherent in speechmaking as a school board member. Above all else, you must keep your dual role of representation in mind. You must be aware of who you are and whom you represent.

Regardless of whether you hold the designation as official spokesman for the board, anything you say in the public domain is likely to be taken as the board's position. *You* may have a clear fix on who is doing the talking, but your *audience* will not. Differing opinions on issues as complex as those addressed by school boards are the natural outcome of the democratic process. Keep in mind, though, that when you are asked to speak as a board member, you are still part of a team.

If you doubt who has been asked to speak—you the citizen or you the board representative—ask yourself how often you were called upon to speak prior to your board service.

If you state an opinion contrary to the board majority, you should also explain the board's position and how your opinions differ. You should stress also that, as a member of a democratic institution, you yield to and are bound by the decision of the majority. Anything less is sour grapes.

Remember, you have the public forum of the board meetings in which to express your views for the record. It's bad form to lose the point through the democratic due process and then plead your case in an outside forum. If you're angry, temper yourself with the knowledge that anger is only one letter short of *danger*.

If the topic is such that you can't restrain yourself, simply avoid the topic. There's wisdom in the adage that it's easy to say nothing and difficult to know when to say nothing. Nowhere is it written that a board member must accept *every* invitation to speak.

Doing your homework. When you are called upon to make a speech, you can save a great deal of extra work by contacting the organization extending the invitation to pin down a few topics of interest to the group. No audience is more captive than the one hearing what it wants to hear.

Once you have a good idea of what you need to say, you can gear your research to what to say. Among your best sources for research are your policy book, the administration, other board members (and former board members), and the various materials published by your district.

All that remains is to add your personal touch—your own thoughts and experiences—and, then, practice until you are comfortable with the material.

4 WAYS TO GET A GOOD SPEECH QUICKLY

One: The position paper

Get together as a board (or with the administration) and develop a set of position papers on key issues. These papers can be a valuable resource for answering inquiries from the media or other patrons of the district. They will help ensure that each board member is quoting the same "party line."

Two: The stock speech

Position papers can form the basis for a number of standardized speeches that any member of the board can take to the community. These should run from six to eight double-spaced pages in length, and should cover from one to no more than three topics relating to the schools. When asked to speak, find out what your audience is most interested in, select the appropriate stock speech, give it your personal touch, and deliver it.

Three: Topical mini-speeches

Compile a notebook of topical mini-speeches. These should run about two to four pages in length and should be limited to a single topic. When asked to speak on a variety of topics, select the mini-speeches that best relate to your audience, add a short introduction, and pull them together into a longer speech.

Four: Policy summaries

Your policies are your framework for governance. If you are called upon to speak on the board's position on various issues, compile a list of the issues, address them one by one, and state clearly what the board policy is on each.

Note: Don't overlook the value of your administrative team for these exercises. They are intimately in tune with the subject matter, can assist with writing and editing, and can help you phrase your speeches in language that represents your dual role.

5 WAYS TO MAKE YOUR SPEECHES MORE INTERESTING

1. Put together (or, as a board, direct the administration to develop) a simple slide presentation focusing on the schools, needed improvements planned in a bond election, or other timely issues. Yes, a picture is worth a thousand words, and here's a way to say several thousand in a short time. *Suggestion:* When developing your own slide presentation, work closely with your administration. You'll need access to the schools, and your management team is aware of special requirements and sensitivities.
2. When you're dealing with statistics, budgets, performance reports, and the like, use flip charts, graphs, and other illustrative materials. *Caution:* Make sure your speaking location set-up and audience size are conducive to using these kinds of visual aids.
3. Have support materials available. If your district publishes brochures, pamphlets, or other public information materials, make them available to your audience. *Suggestion:* Arrange to have the materials delivered and set out before your arrival. Carry samples to the rostrum with you and call attention to them.
4. Develop illustrative points or stories that highlight how your audience has been involved in the schools. *Examples:* Your organization's president, Harvey Smith, graduated from your own Central High School; the booster club has made its impact known on your athletic programs through such activities as its annual award banquets; or when you went to the chamber of commerce two years ago seeking support for the district's bond election, they responded above and beyond your expectations.
5. Save enough time (but not too much) for a question-and-answer session. *Suggestion:* Ask a couple of friendly members of the audience to ask the first couple of questions, and you'll avoid that often uncomfortable moment that accompanies the audience's natural fear of asking the first question. *Caution:* Q and A's can be "loaded gun" situations. Stick to your policies and party line. If necessary, keep a copy of your policy manual or a briefing sheet with you for easy reference.

SPEAKING FOR THE SCHOOLS

In your personal communication with constituents, you will find that when parents are pleased with their children's schooling—and millions are—then everything is right with the public schools for those parents. When parents are unhappy with their children's schooling—and millions are—then everything is wrong with the schools.

Individual assessments are inevitable. You can't argue with them. In responding to complaints about public schools in general, it will be helpful to take a long-range view of public education. To see and talk about what is right with the schools today, you will need to stand back in time and space, to see and put the schools in perspective.

To assess the schools properly, you will need a variety of measuring sticks, not just the reactions to children's report cards. The verdict of history, facts from the census, results of studies, comparisons with other countries, testimonials from prominent Americans—these provide the clues to our schools' effectiveness.

Here are a few such measuring sticks for your collection:

1. "The schools have kept us free," said Henry Steele Commager, the historian. This ringing affirmation for the public schools was the conclusion of an essay published in 1950 in *Life* magazine. Other historians have since supported this view. Commager pointed out that the public schools have, over the years, developed a literate and civic-conscious people which has kept at bay tyranny and dictatorship. "No other people ever demanded so much from education as have the American people. None other was ever served so well by its schools," Commager said.
2. In most other countries of the world, authorities draw a circle around their educational institutions and say, in effect, "Only the few can step inside to get an education." The circle is drawn to shut people out. In the United States, we draw a circle and say, in effect, "Everyone step in."

   When millions of immigrants poured into the United States in the century between 1820 and 1920 (and many years later), the public schools were open for them. For parents from scores of foreign lands, there were night schools and Americanization schools, under board of education control. For their children, there were concerned teachers who introduced them to our language, culture, and ethics. "The common school changed the immigrants," said historian David B. Tyack, "and the immigrants altered the common schools." Today, the children and grandchildren of immigrants are in Congress, in high places of government, business, art, labor, national defense, science, and technology—and the vast majority of them are graduates of the public schools.
3. American students do well in comparison with students of other nations. To the surprise of some, American boys and girls at age 14 do exceptionally well in reading when compared with youngsters in other lands. In science, they do better than their counterparts in Britain, the Netherlands and Italy, but not as well as those in Japan, the U.S.S.R., and Germany. They do as well in math as Swedish students, but not as well as those in Japan or France.
4. "No other nation has carried such a high percentage of its citizens so far up the educational ladder," says Harold Hodgkinson, a former director of the National Institute of Education in Washington. He offers these facts:
   - Close to 90 percent of 5 to 17-year-olds were enrolled in school at the beginning of this decade. In 1900, the figure was as low as 72 percent.
   - Over 92 percent of the students enrolled attend classes regularly. In 1900, only 69 percent attended regularly.
   - As recently as 1950, only about half of all white students and one-fourth of black students graduated from high school. Today, 85 percent of whites and 75 percent of blacks complete high school.
   - More than 50 percent of high school graduates go on to higher education compared to the 10 to 20 percent who entered post-secondary education in 1950. American public schools are now doing for half of the school population what they used to do for only the top 10 percent.
5. When Phi Delta Kappa, an educational fraternity, asked prominent Americans what's right with the public schools, all responded with testimonials about the effective education they had and about the influence of public school teachers.

Said Erma Bombeck, humorist and syndicated columnist: "Teachers were my entire life. They looked at me. They talked to me. They spent time with me. They ate with me. They played with me. But, mostly, they spent their time convincing me I was better than I thought I was."

Said Birch Bayh, former U.S. Senator from Indiana: "(Once) a teacher sat me down and said, 'Birch, how can you have so much potential and yet be achieving so far below it? I am going to be expecting more from you in the future!'. . . I am convinced that without that critical and compassionate conversation, I would have done much worse."

Said Norman Cousins, author and editor: "In my first year of high school, I had a biology teacher . . . who was one of the least ambiguous personalities I have ever known. When he had a suggestion to make, he invested the enterprise with total personal commitment. It was difficult to remain uninfluenced by his presence."

Dealing with the news media

"I've heard reporters say, 'Who needs board sources?' and I've heard board members say, 'Who needs the media?' The fact is, we need each other if we're both going to meet our obligations to the public." —Board member, Rhode Island

You don't have to look very far to find out what is wrong with the schools and public education. In newspapers, on television, and on the radio are ample examples of how test scores have declined, how public confidence in education has slumped, and how public schools are lagging behind private schools in providing a quality education.

There are times when any school board might conclude, "It's the public schools against the media." Often, it seems the media is preoccupied with the negative. Nothing, however, could be farther from the truth.

To be sure, today's news reports contain their fair share of negatives. Our airwaves and news pages fairly explode with spectres of gloom and doom. However, they also overflow with human achievements and bright features of human interest.

Understanding mutual dependence

If you and your colleagues are going to work effectively with the news media, you will need to seek an understanding of what the media is. You're going to have to accept that, even in an adversary relationship, your board and the media depend mutually upon each other.

The media needs your board and your schools as a source of community news. No responsible news organization can purport to represent its community if it overlooks one of the community's most important institutions. However, the hard fact is that your board is more dependent on the media than the media is on you.

How does the public learn about the board?

When the public does learn about school board activities, it is mostly through the general news media and word of mouth, rather than direct contact with their school board. For parents, however, school board and district newsletters, PTA participation, and the reports of their own children play an important role, even as the general news media are most often relied upon. Non-parents, on the other hand, rely primarily on the general news media and secondarily on their friends and neighbors.

What to expect from the media

Newspapers are more likely to report school news than any other news media. Radio and television coverage has been less common. Obviously, more extensive coverage of a school board is most likely to occur during a crisis.

Working with the media

One of the most important aspects of working with the media is to have a communication policy that is easily understood by the media, the board, or the school staff.

To prepare your board for its media responsibilities, you and your colleagues should make certain that your communication policy clearly addresses *who is responsible for what* when it comes to media relations. Ideally, your policy will divide these responsibilities to coincide with the manner in which your district operates. It should address—at bare minimum:

Board responsibilities. Your board must meet its policy and budgetary commitments and provide for monitoring implementation of the district's communication plan. Additionally, it should spell out in policy that the designated spokesman for your board will make most "official" comments to the media on behalf of the board.

POLICY
OFFICIAL

Policy should identify who will make official statements for the board.

"Wishing you had not spoken out of turn is a poor substitute for not having spoken in the first place."
—Superintendent, Massachusetts

Individual member responsibilities. The board's policy should also address procedures for individual members when speaking to the press. For example, your board may have occasions, such as promoting a bond issue, when each of its members will be speaking to the press. Each individual member should have a clear understanding of the issue and otherwise be prepared to speak about the board's position on it. Also, you and your colleagues should establish a standard disclaimer that informs the press that any individual comment does not necessarily reflect the views of the full board. A ready example of this kind of disclaimer is the one included on many television programs stating, "The content is solely the responsibility of the producers and does not necessarly reflect the views of this station."

Staff responsibilities. Just as your board will publicly address school board matters, school staff will speak on many aspects of school operations. Your board's policy should clearly direct the procedures under which "talking for the schools" will occur. The superintendent should designate an official spokesman for the administration. In many school districts, the superintendent plays this role; but he may delegate parts of it to the public information director, to an administrator with some expertise in a particular area (for example, the finance director might discuss the budget), or to a building principal who would speak to his particular school's program.

Foremost, your board's policy should set out clearly how the flow of information to the media is to be delegated (and *how much* of it is to be delegated) from the board to the administration to the staff.

"Sometimes I read what reporters think they heard me say and I realize that Dorothy wasn't the only one who went to Oz. But, in general, the media does a credible job of covering our district."
—Board member, Kansas

SUGGESTION

Make media relations an integral part of your board's communication policy. Stress the importance of utilizing all forms of news media. Far too often, school boards define media relations in terms of newspapers. Be sure the district's communication program incorporates mention of both print and broadcast media.

Working with reporters

Once your board has addressed how it will structure its dealings with the media and reaches an understanding with the administration regarding a district program for media communication, media relations comes down to the personal level.

Whether the communication comes from the board spokesman, the superintendent, the public information director, or another staff member, it will be directed to the individual who outwardly represents the media: the reporter.

"In times of trouble, don't react like the man who jumped on his horse and galloped off in all directions. Plan your official statement and stick to it."
—Board member, Alaska

The basic components of working with a reporter are no different than any other form of face-to-face communicating. Your district's communication team will need preparation, candor, a sense of history, background materials, accessibility, and courtesy.

Here are some tips for dealing with reporters that will help your board and its staff get more mileage out of media relations:

Develop a personal relationship with the reporters assigned to cover your district. Become familiar with their operating styles and their work. Keep the relationship friendly, but professional. Don't put them in a delicate position by taking them to task for the philosophy of their news organization, don't blame them for something an editor did with a headline or opinion piece, and don't try to tell them how to write a story. Give them information. Be credible and tell all—or as much as you can—of the story. Don't "bribe" them with gifts, exclusive stories, or by overdoing social events. There's no such thing as a free lunch.

Find out what reporters want and need. Not all news organizations have the same requirements for story subjects. Take the time to discover what reporters have on their "wish lists" and what particular assignments they have received from their editors. Then give them what they want.

Work through reporters. If you have a problem, learn from your own chain of command. Don't go over a reporter's head until you have first gone to the reporter. If your district is producing news releases and other informative materials, ask the reporter if he wants to receive them or if he prefers such releases go to another party. It is not uncommon for news organizations to separate board functions and school functions into separate beats, each with its own reporter. Says one editor from Texas, "I wanted my campus reporters isolated from the politics of the board meeting. Having separate reporters gave

"We always had a conflict because the media didn't want to print what I wanted them to print, and I often couldn't say what they wanted to hear."
—Superintendent, Oregon

"You can avoid the temptation to make a fool out of a reporter in front of your colleagues if you keep in mind that he, in turn, can make a fool out of you in front of your constituents." —Board member, Arkansas

me better coverage and the advantages that come from having good reporters compete with each other to produce the best stories on the schools."

Be aware of deadlines and other timing issues. The importance of deadlines to the news media is self-evident. In addition, every news organization has what is known as "slow news days," when the level of activity leaves them with less to report. By determining when the demand is highest and the supply is lowest, your board and staff can increase the likelihood the media will use district-generated news releases.

Provide background information, preferably in a written format. Giving a reporter some sense of history or charts, graphs, and analyses of complex financial issues can go a long way toward avoiding misinformation and misunderstandings.

Make sure all of your efforts include the five "W's." Nothing is less useful to the media than information that does not detail *what* is happening or to be done, *who* is or will be doing it, *why* it is or will be occurring, *when* it is happening or will happen, and *where*.

Tips on talking to reporters

In addition to the preparation of press releases and other materials, media relations involves face-to-face interviews and press conferences. Here are some tips for handling personal contacts with the media:

"The public's right to know should stand above the board's desire to control the media and communication about the schools." —Board member, Pennsylvania

The first priority is preparation. When you are preparing to speak to the press, make sure you have a grasp of the facts. Know what you are talking about. If necessary, bring printed materials with you for reference, or state that the board has taken an action supported by documentation and give the reporter the materials. Most school documents are public records, so there is no reason to withhold them. Use them to your advantage.

You might find it useful to sit down with the superintendent and some key staff members for a briefing on various aspects of the district's work. Discuss questions that are likely to arise and determine what kinds of materials you have at your disposal.

Be on time. You can't talk to a reporter if he or she leaves before you arrive for your appointment; so be punctual. The reporter may have scheduled several such appointments, or may have blocked out a specific number of minutes in which to record your interview for broadcast. If your board is asked to provide a reporter with some type of document, respond quickly.

"Board members are too quick to pour their views into my ears and to accuse me of putting words into their mouths." —Reporter, Texas

Talk plainly and talk candidly. Don't use jargon with reporters. You'll confuse them, and they'll confuse their audiences. Remember, you are communicating *through* the reporter to a much larger, more diverse audience.

Be candid and honest. Don't bend the truth or try to mislead the reporter. If you're asked a question to which you don't wish to respond, say so; but make it positive and be polite. If you don't know the answer to a question, don't fabricate, guess, or estimate. Tell the reporter that you don't know the answer and offer to provide a response when you obtain the information you need.

If the nature of the question involves figures, it is quite acceptable to use rounded numbers. Be certain, though, the reporter understands that you aren't being exact. There doesn't *appear* to be much difference between "about a million dollars" and $1.2 million. On paper, however, that difference looks like this: $200,000.

Be courteous. You can't argue with the high-speed press or the technology of audio and videotape. Use diplomacy in your responses to reporters. *Example:* You don't want to tell a reporter that a question is stupid. A diplomatic response is, "Many people get confused on this point. Let me clarify it for you." You shouldn't accuse a reporter of trying to needle you. Instead reply, "I'm not sure I understand what you are asking."

"Sometimes you have to let a misstatement go unchallenged simply because you can't set the record straight without getting into details that are not for public disclosure." —Board member, New Mexico

Trust the reporter. Related to courtesy is trusting the reporter. There are very few occasions in which it is good procedure to ask to see a reporter's story before it runs. It is far better to suggest that the reporter call you if additional clarification seems necessary. After all, your board would not consider asking a reporter to review a policy before adoption, so why should you expect as much from a reporter? However, if a rare legitimate case arises—for example, a story in which legal restrictions demand specific language—and you want to review the material before publication or broadcast, then stipulate this as a condition of granting the interview *before* you agree to arrange getting together with the reporter. Be sure to explain why you are making the request. If the reporter knows you are looking out for both of your best interests, your request will be honored and appreciated. Never *assume* that you will be allowed to review a reporter's work, and don't try to make arrangements to do so *after* an interview.

One final note about talking to reporters: *Nothing is off-the-record.* A far better approach to those times when you believe the press should have information you would prefer not be printed is to schedule a background briefing—on the record, but with the express understanding that the material offered is non-source-attributable background only. Under those circumstances, a reporter is ethically bound to use the information only if sources are not named, and also is aware of the reasons the material is sensitive. That leaves the reporter in the position of making a free choice of whether or not to use the story.

The important thing to remember, however, is that background sessions should be used sparingly. A good working tool to guide your board on what should and should not be included in these sessions in your state's Sunshine laws. Items excluded from the public domain should remain off the record. Items of sensitivity that are part of the public domain are ideal for background sessions.

Here's an example of an instance in which you should avoid unofficial press contacts:

Your board and superintendent reach accord on terminating his contract. The board should issue a public statement concerning the action taken, those details that are appropriate under the law, and other relevant facts to which both the parties agree. The statement should address nothing more.

If you schedule a non-attributable background session—or worse, an off-the-record session—with a reporter, you are violating the terms of your agreement with the superintendent. Worse, if public pressure builds for a more detailed explanation, the reporter might decide to disclose inappropriate details.

Facing up to the facts

Your board may not always find its relationship with the media one of the brightest aspects of public service, but you and your colleagues must face up to these basic facts:

- Board members are public servants.
- The media is a business that must satisfy its consumers' appetites for information.
- You need the media more than it needs you, but the relationship is one of mutual dependency.
- The media has power and influence, and a school board must strive to cultivate media coverage that is positive and informative.
- The school board's credibility and the media's credibility are always at stake.
- The public's *lack* of information about a school district is the district's and board's worst enemy.

"BUT... BUT... I THOUGHT I WAS 'OFF-THE-RECORD.'"

"It's a fact that the facts, whatever they are, are seldom as damaging as misinformation or misunderstanding."
—Executive staff member, AASA

> ***"Whatever a board does should be done in the public eye because the school district is like a sieve: When all or part of the story eventually leaks, the media thinks the district tried to hide something, and the board's credibility is damaged."***
> ***—Board member, Florida***

Getting the most out of the media

To get the most out of the news media, remember these points:

- ○ Include media relations in your policy on communication.
- ○ Appoint a spokesman for the board and the schools.
- ○ Delegate communication responsibilities clearly.
- ○ Use all the media at your disposal.
- ○ Take advantage of public service announcements and other services offered by various elements of the media.
- ○ Find out what the media wants and give it to them.

Finally, don't depend solely on the conventional media: Your board's policy should evoke a communication program that establishes your board—not the media—as the leader in disseminating information about your schools.

As noted by a 25-year board veteran from Wisconsin, "The biggest problem with the press is that points or issues that are of greatest importance to a board member or the board are not the ones that the reporter thinks are important." To combat this, your board and its staff should use other communication channels and get your story told through the media the district legitimately controls. News organizations may be *The Media,* but they are certainly not the *only* media.

THE BIG 10

From a veteran editor who, as a reporter, covered seven large metropolitan and three small rural school districts comes what he terms, "*The Ten Commandments of Dealing with Reporters*":

I. Honor the open meeting law.
II. Provide access to public records.
III. Provide working space for the press, provide them an agenda, and notify them of the regular meeting schedule and all special meetings.
IV. Do not lie, mislead, or intimidate.
V. Do not seek correction but, rather, seek clarification of inaccuracies or views.
VI. Give news to reporters and seek endorsements and editorials from editors or editorial boards. Do not assume your campaign budget will purchase endorsement.
VII. Realize that there is no such thing as "no comment." Explain the reasons (such as legal or policy restrictions) why a topic cannot be discussed.
VIII. Do not play favorites among reporters.
IX. Do not go "off the record." If background information is necessary, conduct an on-the-record briefing with the understanding that no specific attribution will be given.
X. Never assume that if you appoint an official spokesman for the board that your comments will not be reported as what a member of the board has said.

"I've only got room for 10!"

PLAIN TALK: PRACTICAL LANGUAGE FOR TALKING TO THE PRESS

George Bernard Shaw once termed the English and the Americans as "two peoples separated by an ocean and a common language." To make sure that you don't erect a language barrier between the local press and your board, use plain talk. Here are some examples of the right and wrong ways to respond to questions when you're meeting the press.

1. **Question:** *What will the new tax rate mean to an average homeowner?*

   Answer: First of all, you have to consider that property valuations have increased, thus the tax rate was adjusted downward. I would say, based upon this and our rising need for school operating revenues, that the increase is nominal. I believe it will raise the taxes on a $50,000 residence by about $4 a year.

   The Problem: This answer is defensive in tone, offers information the reporter did not seek, and puts off the conclusion in deference to a buildup.

   Plain Talk: The impact will be slight. It will mean an increase of about $4 per year on a $50,000 residence.

2. **Question:** *What is the purpose of this field trip?*

   Answer: Our school district believes that significant enrichment of the educational experience occurs when out-of-facility functions include multiple levels of participation between our personnel and our patrons.

   The Problem: The "buzz words of board service" have made an untimely appearance.

   Plain Talk: The trip will bring our teachers, students, and parents together to share a learning experience. They will find out more about the subject and each other.

3. **Question:** *What will the district do if the teachers walk out?*

   Answer: We might try to keep classes open by using volunteers or supervisory personnel. If it is possible, we might close the schools and try to make up the time by adjusting the school calendar at a later date. We have a number of options, and these are some of them.

   The Problem: Answering hypothetical questions is non-productive. This answer opens a whole can of emotional worms and is likely to provoke public concern over options that might never be employed.

   Plain Talk: We have a number of contingency plans and, if appropriate, we will discuss them at the time they are implemented. It is not useful to talk about "ifs." At this time, negotiations with our teachers are proceeding, and we continue to seek a reasonable agreement.

4. **Question:** *You voted against closing the school, but lost. What will you do now?*

   Answer: I plan to report to my constituents and see if I can get the matter reconsidered. As I said in the board meeting, I think this is a terrible inconvenience to the students and parents involved.

   The Problem: This answer oversteps the bounds of working together as a board. Reasonable persons can disagree, but majority rules. If there is significant interest in reconsidering the issue, your constituents will make their feelings known to the board. There is no point in exacerbating an already difficult situation.

   Plain Talk: I offered my opinions during the meeting, and the board heard the public input. The majority still felt that closing the school was in the best interests of the school system, and I must defer to the majority.

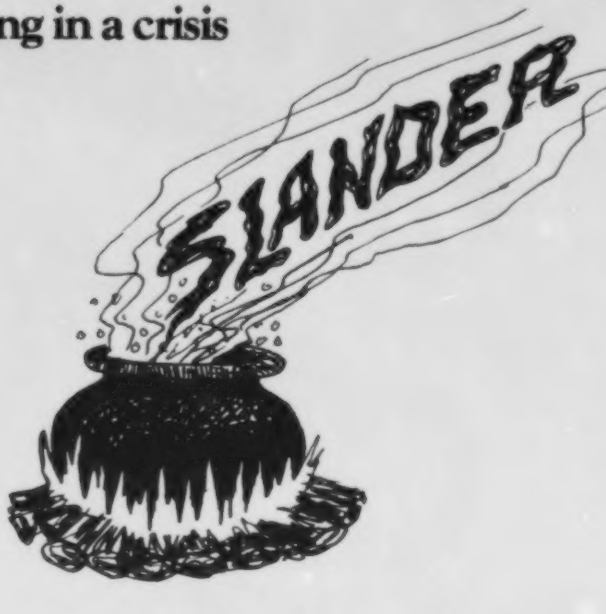
Sometimes, plain talk is a replacement for what hasn't been said. Rather than refusing to talk to a reporter or not returning a reporter's telephone calls, employ the plainest talk of all: Say, "I have no comment," and explain briefly why you choose not to speak.

Having the reporter write that you "declined to comment" is more desirable than reading "school officials were not available for comment" or "repeated calls to school board members went unanswered."

By talking to the reporter, you can explain your reasons for not wishing to comment. That will damage your relationship with the reporter far less than employing that holdover term from the Watergate era: "stonewalling." A "no comment" indicates some reasoned judgment for withholding information. No response implies hiding information.

Communicating in a crisis

"It doesn't matter where the rumors start, just where they end."
—Board member, Texas



"There should be a board policy on crisis. The administration should handle crisis, keep the board informed, and come to the board only if policy concerns arise."
—Board member, New York

The basic causes of crisis situations vary. Any board, however, can count on four major elements to be present: emotion, rumors, the news media, and a school board that must respond.

If the school board and its staff hesitate, are indecisive, or freeze into nonaction with doubt about how to respond to a crisis, the result is totally predictable. Says a board member who went through just such a scenario, "We soon discovered that a community being fed misinformation or left to wrestle with rumor can quickly become a simmering pot of slander and unrest."

What was the lesson learned from the experience? Says the board member, "We discovered that rule number one is to set the record straight. Even if it means a smattering of egg on your face, the public deserves to know what happened."

The sad part of this experience is that if this board had prepared for crisis communication before it was needed—by establishing a communication policy—it might have avoided both the "egg on the face" and the crisis.

Instead, the board paid a high price. As one school leader explains, "Whatever the cause of a local public education crisis, the effect is the same: The school board suffers a loss of public trust, and that's one commodity no school board can afford to lose."

"If a board doesn't have a good crisis policy, it could end up contributing to the crisis because of the way it might get involved."
—Board member, Florida

"Schoolboarding" would be a great deal simpler if all board members could echo the claim of the board veteran from Michigan who reported: "We never hear any complaints. People call or stop us on the streets just to say how well everything is going with the schools."

Unfortunately, this is not how a great many board members find board service. Even the gentleman from Michigan adds, perhaps prophetically, "I keep wondering how long it can last. When will it end?"

His board and yours can't wait for it to end, or for a crisis to begin. Crisis communication is a serious business that calls for a clear understanding of how everyone involved should respond to a crisis.

"A board without a policy for meeting the communication needs in a crisis is already facing a crisis."
—Board member, Delaware

What a policy should cover

A policy to defuse a crisis involves five major components:

- ○ A designated crises manager.
- ○ An ongoing means of gathering information, both factual and speculative.
- ○ A commitment to investigate the situation in order to separate fact from fiction.
- ○ A system for communicating what is learned back to the internal and external school publics.
- ○ A decision-making process.

One of the first decisions that must be made when a crisis occurs is who will handle it. If your board has a policy that deals with crises, then the management of crises and crises communication should come from the administration. If the crisis area falls outside of established policy, it will probably require board action.

"It never hurts to seek improvement in your policy for communicating during a crisis. After all, you're likely to need it again: School critics abound. They compare apples to oranges and go bananas." —Superintendent, Utah

In either case, the district's crisis plan should call first for fact-finding. The board and its staff simply cannot respond to rumors or misinformation if you do not know what's being said. You can't respond with the *facts* until you know what *fictions* you are countering.

Usually, such information is easy to obtain. It might be out on the sidewalk, scrawled in large letters across picket signs. It might be brought into the board room by irate citizens. You might hear it over the telephone, or the district's key communicators might tap the rumor mill. Regardless of the sources, this first phase involves listening, sorting, and sifting. Also, the media should be contacted at this point.

The next phase of a crisis plan should set out the details on how the claims and counterclaims will be investigated. This phase should occur quickly, and the board or administration should publicize the fact that it is looking into the matters in question. Merely investigating, of course, will not end the crisis, but it will help to cool emotions and provide an atmosphere for reasonable discussion.

Once investigation has occurred, and the board has heard from the administration, don't sit on the information. If a board decision is needed, make it; then the information-gathering process can be reversed. Key communicators might be called upon to carry the district's findings on rumors back to the community. The media should be leveled with as candidly as possible. "For-publication" statements should be put in writing, and should stick to the facts: There shouldn't be speculation on what the outcome of the crisis is likely to be.

Finally, your district's plan should provide for making decisions. The board and the administration should take a position and communicate it to all of the parties involved. Cite clearly what occurred in the process of making the decision and the reasons for making it.

When it's over

When the crisis ends (even the most violent storms eventually blow over), your board or the administration should thank the parties, your sources of information, and the media for their participation.

Your board's policy should require the board and administration to evaluate how well the board's policy and the administration's crisis plan work. This might be done on a periodic basis or after each major crisis. It might be helpful to ask school staff and the news media for a formal appraisal of where the policy and plan work and where they fail. The appraisal should assess if the crisis communication policy adequately addresses crises before they occur, while they occur, and after they have passed. From this evaluation will come a basis for making refinements in board policy and administrative procedure.

Remember: A policy is only a means of being prepared to fight fires when they flare up. Most authorities agree that maintaining a year-round communication program—which includes provisions for crisis communication—will help avert many crises by allowing a board, its members, and its administration to deal with little problems before they become big ones.

THE DAY THE SCHOOL BOARD GOT FIRED

Did you read that headline?

If it seems sensational, you should have seen the headlines that swirled around a midwestern school board that found itself unprepared to communicate clearly in a crisis situation.

Actually, the school board didn't get fired. By one account, what really happened was, "A community seething with discontent over its schools snarled its displeasure in a recall election that promptly deposed an entire school board."

After the fact, the deposed board sorted out the pieces and came up with a list of "Seven Lessons Learned." These lessons, reported in the *American School Board Journal*, provide illumination of the need for school boards and school districts to adopt a communication plan, and provisions for utilizing the plan for communicating during a crisis:

Lesson 1. Don't expect the news media to tell the board's side of the story if they haven't been supplied the facts.

Lesson 2. The citizens of a community who do not have children in school still pay taxes, and they have a right to demand information about their schools.

Lesson 3. Never forget your responsibility to listen to the people you represent as a school board member.

Lesson 4. A lack of communication with the public can back your board into a corner from which it cannot escape.

Lesson 5. Communication will not solve every problem, but don't expect to survive without it.

Lesson 6. Being a good board member is never easy.

Lesson 7. Never underestimate the power of public opinion. It is formidable.

How to cope with pressure groups

"But I thought all pressure groups went to heaven!"

"Dealing with pressure is serious business. To avoid misunderstanding, discord, or outright hostility, you need a plan for communicating with all kinds of pressure groups." —Superintendent, North Dakota

Call them what you will—activists, consumerists, special interests—but know them for what they are: *pressure groups.*

As a school board member, you need to know who is actively bringing pressure against the schools and who is likely to do so under various circumstances.

If your board doesn't have a plan for dealing with them, pressure groups can make board life miserable. These groups tend to be well organized, are usually polarized around a unifying issue, and know how to get the attention of the media.

As one Oklahoma community relations director wrote in the *Journal of Educational Communication (The School PR Magazine)*: "These active and inactive pressure groups can mean positive forces for education, or they can be negative forces wreaking untold destruction on school-community relations. Your approach in dealing with them can make the difference in the kind of influence they will have in your school district."

Here's what you and your board can do to cope successfully with pressure groups:

"You handle confrontations by having a policy on addressing the board. You can't afford to let people disrupt the board meeting." —Board member, Michigan

Have written policy on public participation. The board's policy governing the participation of the public in board meetings can help the board maintain control of its meetings, while giving pressure groups a suitable avenue for expression. Time limits are important, as well as a demonstrably attentive ear from the board.

Have fair policies and procedures. Fair policies and procedures and their fair implementation can deflate some of the pressure some groups can build. These written guidelines can help halt accusations of poor planning or the use of "hip pocket policy." When fair policies guide board and administrative actions over a period of time, those actions are less likely to be subject to sudden emotional pressures applied by narrowly defined special interests. Of particular importance are policies and procedures for:

- ○ Public use of facilities.
- ○ Distribution of pamphlets and brochures.
- ○ Participation of students or employees in contests or school-conducted promotions.
- ○ Textbook selection.
- ○ General school operations.
- ○ Handling the relationships the board has with other community groups or agencies.
- ○ Due process proceedings.
- ○ Employee hiring, transfer, promotion, and dismissal.
- ○ Handling complaints or requests for changes in the curriculum.

It's important to note that a written grievance procedure should allow public appeal to the board *only* when a conflict cannot be resolved by putting the complaint through the normal chain of command. An example of such a conflict was given by a Tennessee board member who said: "I remember a year when the board shortened the length of the spring break. There was no way to avoid hearing from the students." Also, it is not enough to have these policies and procedures in writing. They should be well publicized through school publications and other avenues.

Give advance public notice on controversial agenda items. If your board knows an item is going to be controversial, let the community know in

***"I see nothing wrong with special interest groups, as long as the board looks for some balance. Sometimes, you only hear one side. It's helpful to delay action and check on what the other side has to say."* —Board member, Tennessee**

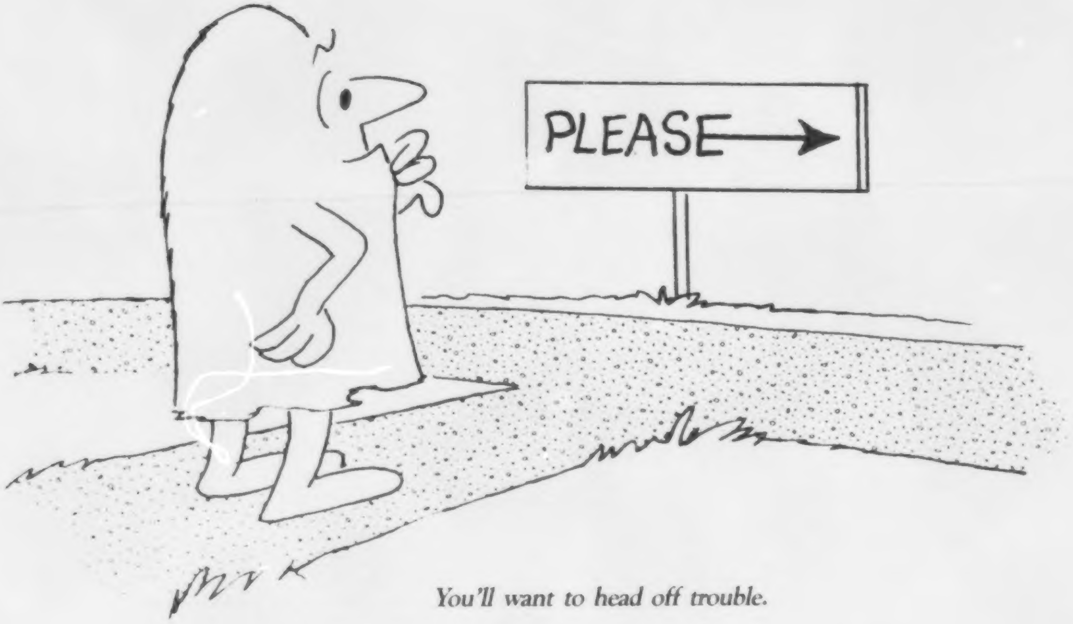
advance when it will appear on the agenda. Invite public comment within a specific time frame, and allow for submittal of longer comments in writing. Let the public know the item is on the agenda for a first consideration and fact-finding. Announce when the board will put the item back on the agenda—after a review of the public comments—for a full review of the board's findings and final actions. This approach might have saved the Tennessee board some time if it had been used prior to the spring break decision cited in the previous paragraph.

Provide for citizen involvement. If your special interest groups are easily identified—such as booster clubs, the parents of special education students, chambers of commerce, citizen action groups—head off trouble by involving them in district advisory committees, and key communicator groups. They will be less likely to confront the board if they have had an earlier opportunity to express their views or can submit a minority report on the committee's recommendations.

The real trick in dealing successfully with pressure groups is to stop always thinking of them as adversaries. You and your colleagues must listen to many views and attempt to understand them if you are going to be able to communicate rationally on those occasions when your actions go against what a pressure group is seeking. Once your board really knows what a pressure group wants, then it can clearly explain why board actions must suit the larger universe of the district.

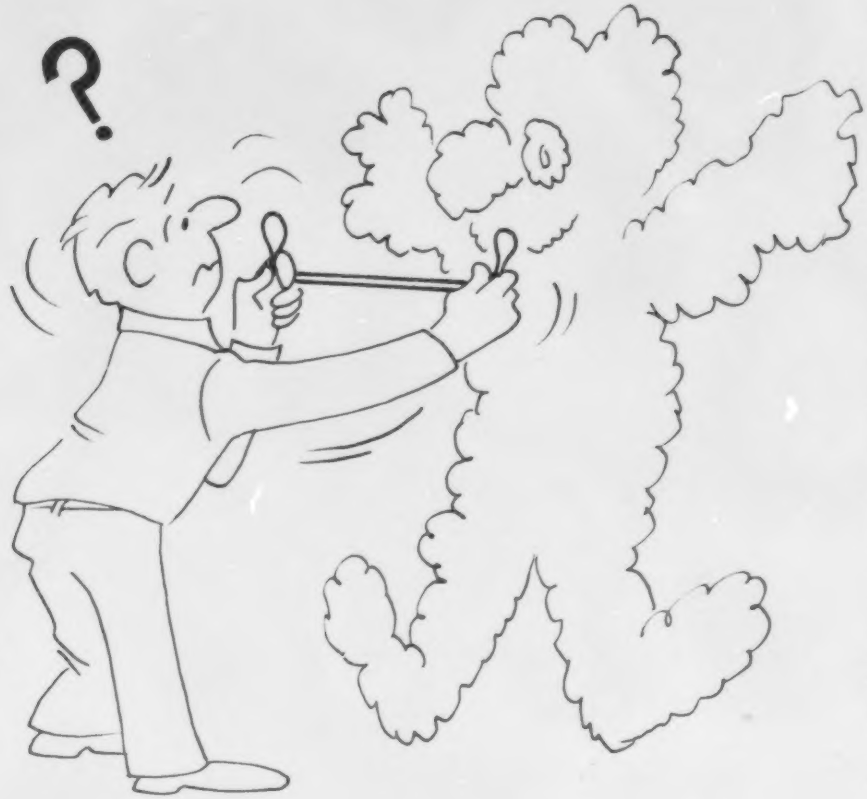
Try to remember that pressure groups exist for a legitimate reason. Says a board member from Massachusetts, "Pressure groups are better organized than ever before. They know how to use the media and to walk a picket line. They have learned how to come forward with a show of strength. Underneath it all, however, is something good. They are saying that they want to be involved in public education."

***"In dealing with pressure groups, a good annual survey of attitudes will provide a pool of thinking from the community to balance against the 30 people with a 'special interest' who are vocal."* —Board member, Wyoming**



You'll want to head off trouble.

Evaluating your communication efforts



Evaluation of communication programs has gained momentum among the professionals of the industry. There was a time when the experts felt measuring PR results was as precise as "measuring a gaseous body with a rubber band," as one put it.

The evaluation process is no more an exact science today. Most of the authorities agree, however, that a communication program can be evaluated to determine if it contains the major elements designed to gain results. Many organizations, such as the National School Public Relations Association, the National School Boards Association, and numerous state school boards associations, have various formats of communication evaluations, ranging in scope from a few basic inquiry items to more complex scoring and rating tools. Any of these organizations will make materials available on request.

What follows is a checklist that, although it is not a definitive or formal evaluation tool, will help you and your board identify what is or is not lacking in your communication program. Your Yes or No responses can serve to help you quickly locate strengths and weaknesses in your efforts to communicate.

There are no passing grades, generally. However, if your answer to any of the questions 1-6 is No, go back to the drawing board.

Yes	No		
—	—	1.	Does the board have a policy specifying communication goals and objectives?
—	—	2.	Is there a step-by-step plan for implementing this policy that specifies the components of and responsibilities for each aspect of the communication program?

Yes No

___ ___ 3. Does the plan include a commitment to identify and communicate with both internal and external school publics?

___ ___ 4. Does it include provisions for dealing effectively with the news media?

___ ___ 5. Does it include a process for planning and executing crisis communication?

___ ___ 6. Have adequate provisions been made in the budget to staff and operate those parts of the plan delegated to the administration?

___ ___ 7. Has the board provided for a professional public information director or, at least, assigned a management-level individual to oversee the implementation of the program?

___ ___ 8. Has the board properly delegated and assumed a background role of monitoring the implementation and functions of the communication program?

___ ___ 9. Has it directed the superintendent to regularly report on the communication program?

___ ___ 10. Has it stressed the importance of communication throughout the school community?

___ ___ 11. Is communication training included in the in-service programs for district employees?

___ ___ 12. Does the district have a publication directed to its employees?

___ ___ 13. Is there a publication directed to patrons of the district, including non-parents?

Yes No

___ ___ 14. Does the board policy and plan provide for feedback from both internal and external publics?

___ ___ 15. Does the board use its meetings as a vehicle for communication and feedback?

___ ___ 16. Does the communication program include citizen involvement components, such as advisory committees and key communicators?

___ ___ 17. Does the plan include guidelines for individual board member communication?

___ ___ 18. Do board members participate in school and community events and stay in touch with other public service and government agencies?

___ ___ 19. Does the board's plan specify an appropriate chain of command for resolving complaints or grievances raised by school staff or patrons?

___ ___ 20. Are all communication efforts evaluated at least annually?

___ ___ 21. Does the board have a designated spokesman?

___ ___ 22. Does the district have a designated spokesman to speak for the schools?

___ ___ 23. Does the public have easy access to board agendas, policy documents, financial data, and other public information?

___ ___ 24. Are public hearings or internal and external surveys conducted before the board takes action on major policy issues, and on items such as the budget, changes in attendance boundaries, and school closings?

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POLITICS AND THE POLITICAL PROCESS

"Politics is not bad, even though some politicians may be. How can a board member who values his own contribution feel that politics is inherently bad?"* —*Board member, Hawaii

A Texas county commissioner had just won reelection to a second term. He stood before a small press conference and pointed to his green and yellow baseball cap—"The colors of grass roots," he explained.

A somewhat cynical reporter shot back, "You've been using that same pitch since your earliest campaigns for the school board. Don't you get tired of being a politician?"

The commissioner replied, "I don't think of myself as a politician. I served on the school board for 14 years—7 of those as president. I have served 4 years on the Commissioners Court. I'm no longer a politician, I'm a statesman."

"What's the difference?"

The commissioner smiled wryly and said, "Public service is politics. As long as you engage in public service, you practice politics. When you've learned your lessons well enough, listened to your constituents long enough, and can combine the two to get support and votes, that's statesmanship."

Board members as politicians

Many people speak the word "politician" as though it leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. Call it statesmanship, diplomacy, or democracy in action, but the Texas commissioner hit the nail on the head when he commented, "Public service *is* politics." School board members *are* politicians.

Many board members will neither back away from nor apologize for this reality. Sometimes they coach their fellow board members in accepting the political nature of their role.

Defining politician

Webster's Dictionary defines a "politician" as "one who is versed in the art and science of government; especially one who is actively engaged in the business of government." A school board is a governmental unit, and board members are engaged in conducting the business of government.

"Sometimes you vote with another person because you want their vote on something later. That's part of the political process. You can't always vote based on your principled position. In too many cases, you'd never accomplish anything."* —*Board member, Georgia

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***"Board members must be compromisers. We're policy makers, and that's what a politician is. We have to relate our policies and our intent in two-way communication."* —Board member, South Carolina**

Political posturing is a reality

Most board members recognize the political posturing boards do. In the words of one board veteran: "Playing for position often arises when pressure groups are coming to the board demanding something. They have to be given something. Often, that may amount to just a hearing or a little bit of time. All board members may know that there is no way you are ever going to give the group what it is demanding; but you can't tell them that up front. You can't send them away mad, because they will come back. They are voters. That's a very political role."

Is it an unfair one? Says one board member: "You have to respond to people. They have to go away feeling that they have been heard. Sometimes you'll spend more time or, perhaps, investigate a certain point. It's all part of the political process. You are never going to have everybody on your side, but you must try to run the school district without alienating voters."

Political process is a must

Perhaps board service would be simpler if it were not a political process, but then schools would not remain close to the people, and school boards would not be one of the grass roots elements of government. Perhaps the best answer to why board members are—and must be—politicians comes from a board member from Oregon, who says: "There is nothing sinister about operating effectively as a politician. You are simply working to affect decisions in your own community, and on your own board. When you work to make your board more effective, you're working to make the district effective in providing young people the best possible education."

Politics begin at home

BOARD MEMBERS

When board members use their clout, they can have a significant impact.

***"The minute you put your name on a ballot or accept an appointment, you become a politician."* —Board member, West Virginia**

School board members comprise the largest body of elected officials in the nation. According to a board member from the Northeast, "We have to realize and take advantage of the fact that *we have clout:* We *are* the people. We are the local level at which elections are won or lost. Our recommendations count."

Although this clout—when combined with the influence and support of state and national school boards associations—has significant impact in the marbled halls of state and federal government, it is earned and maintained right in your own backyard—in your school district.

***"I'd been threatened by a council member who was just plain overstepping his bounds. I had to tell him where his place was. It was like walking a tightrope because, in the end, I needed his support."* —Board member, District of Columbia**

The ways of a politician

As a board member, your political activities take many forms. You are on the political trail when you appear at school activities, when you visit the schools, when you serve as a board spokesman, and when you make a speech.

You and the members of your board assume the role of politician when you open board meetings to the public, when you discuss the annual budget with your constituents or your city or county council, or when you demand that the public schools get their fair share of the community's resources.

You know you are a politician when the other political entities in the community lobby you. One board member who learned that lesson called a city councilman requesting his support for the district's budget. The gentleman informed her the support would be forthcoming—all he wanted in return was for the board to fire the superintendent.

A need to work with local officials

Local boards need to be aware of politics, and the varied relationships they have with other elected officials.

"In a small community, it's not difficult to see who has the power." —Board member, New Hampshire

In many areas, the school budget is part of the city or county budget, and the local boards have learned that laying the foundation for positive budget results often means extending political cooperation into other areas.

"We've only this year begun to influence local legislation," says a Pennsylvania board member. "We now have joint meetings relating to tax collection methods, police protection, and disaster drills. As a result, the political relationship between the board and city officials has been strengthened."

Reports another board member, "We work with the county officials on their programs. When they have a bond election, we help them promote it. They return the favor when we go to our patrons for school improvement bonds. Call it 'back scratching,' politics, or whatever. I call it *good politics* to do what must be done to ensure that our schools and our community are the best they can be."

"There is structure at every level of society. The people with the power don't always wear white collars." —Board member, Massachusetts

Working with the community power structure

Other political entities are not the only ones school boards lobby for support, nor are they the only ones who lobby the school boards in return. Healthy two-way communication means that your board will be working with and hearing from the broad base of leadership that forms your community's power structure.

In some districts, the power structure may be obvious. In other districts, it may be ill-defined or hardly visible. This will depend on the size of the community, how transient its members are, community economics, and individual perceptions.

One Texas board member explains: "No two people in my community hold all the power. There's no one you have to convince about something before anybody else will believe you; but there are influential people here who are respected, and to whom I go because they have good judgment. It's not a power structure, as much as it is a balanced community."

Power-structure people can include the members of old and respected families, judges, clergymen, businessmen, members of service organizations, booster clubs, members of the PTA or PTO, and members of teachers' unions.

All of these people have elements of power in your community and schools. Interacting with your board and other elected officials, they may decide how your community will be structured for years to come: what its growth policies will be, what kind of industrial base it will have, and what kind of governmental services it will demand. All are decisions which impact your school district.

Working with the local power structure is important to your board. "If you don't have a pretty good handle on the power structure, you aren't in a position to make the changes that might be needed in the school district or the community," says a board member from a large urban district. She says she didn't even realize such a structure existed until she took her board seat, but candidly admits that she learned quickly who comprised her district's structure.

Working with other leaders in the community is not unpalatable. It can be a challenge, though, and it can be rewarding. It also can bring your community and schools closer together. It can make your board more aware of social problems or where to go when you need help in getting the board's message across.

"A board needs to deal with a whole community of people," one board member says. "Anything that affects children needs to be addressed by the board. If you have serious problems such as poverty, teacher strikes, drugs or alcohol, you have to rely on your relationships with other areas of the community."

"Our chamber of commerce has tremendous power," adds another board member. "The board president has *ex-officio* status with the chamber, which enables him to address chamber members on anything the schools are doing.

"I'm always surprised when the community considers me part of the power structure, because I have no political ambitions. It just goes to show that everybody doesn't ascribe to or understand power in the same way." —Board member, North Dakota

"In our area, we've always had good cooperation. That doesn't mean you don't have to pound on the table once in awhile, but it does mean that you eventually get things accomplished." —Board member, Minnesota

"Public education cannot survive without public support. Coalition building in the community is the way to generate that support. With it, political leaders are likely to allocate adequate funding for the public schools, more confident than usual that people will have the desire to pay for it." —Executive director, NSBA

This helps us elicit the help of business people on bond issues. We also had a problem with businesses relocating outside our boundaries. Making businessmen aware of the potential tax-base problems and the effects it would have on our schools helped us keep some industries within our boundaries."

Working with local elected bodies and other elements of the community is a two-sided proposition. These organizations will expect to speak and be heard on issues affecting the schools, but that's the kind of positive trade-off good communication and good politics is all about.

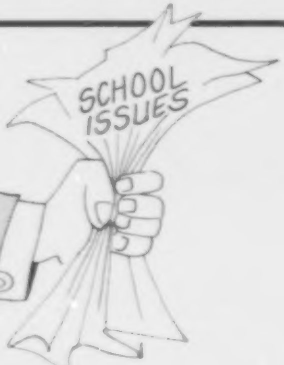
BUILD COALITIONS FOR STRONG SCHOOLS

As the need for financial and community support of the public schools grows, the need for board members and school administrators to engage in "coalition building" also grows.

Predicated on the plain fact that everybody has a substantial interest in the schools, your board and its administration must reach out to the community—to business (with its expanding technology that cries out for academically well-grounded employees), to labor (a known supporter of high quality education), to senior citizens (whose increasing percentage of the population strengthens their political force), to civic groups (whose special interests must be considered) and, of course, to parents, students, teachers, and other school employees.

These coalitions will generate support for your schools in the community if they are structured properly and the people involved believe they are being dealt with sincerely and effectively. Plainly, this means that the board and the administration must be prepared to do at least as much listening as talking, develop specific action plans as the result of the dialogue, never call a meeting without a substantial agenda, and assess coalition evaluation processes so that coalition members can be assured that their participation is something more than PR fluff.

Partisan politics



Try to address school issues on a bipartisan basis.

As a board member-politician, you can't duck the issue of partisan politics. Labels are inherent to the political process. They apply to your philosophy and to your party preferences.

Although most board elections legally are non-partisan and carry the "aura" of non-partisanship, the political partisanship of a school board eventually will be assessed according to its membership. Terms like "the conservative majority" and "the coalition of Republicans and Democrats" will creep into media reports. Like any other aspect of communication, what an individual does will be viewed as what the board does.

No one insists, however, that you surrender your prerogatives as a citizen when you accept your board seat. If you have future political plans—reelection to the board or seeking other public office—partisanship will play a part.

"There are legions of board members who have moved on to higher office. Among the most famous: President Thomas Jefferson. Partisanship played its part." —Board member, Virginia

A personal choice

Any decision on partisanship is personal. However, most board members find that partisan politics is difficult to avoid:

○ Legislators are becoming increasingly fond of asking lobbyists where they were when the legislator was running for election.

○ Parties are only as good as their members. If you become active in party politics, your views will be heard.

○ Even if you don't like to see partisanship affect anything at the school level, sooner or later, you have to work to elect candidates who support public education, and that entails partisanship.

"The truth is, unless we become involved in partisan politics, local control of schools will become a memory." —Board member, Nebraska

The key to success

To be successful at partisan politics, you will need to address school issues on a bipartisan basis, and make your individual politics a blend of bipartisan and party activities. You and your board should work diligently to separate its members' partisanship from their philosophy of running the schools. Educating children is a universal, non-partisan responsibility. You don't want to damage your board's ability to meet that charge by involving the schools in the partisan issues of who is in or out of power.

The lobbying process

> ***"Wherever you have a significant source of money or control, you've got to be politically active. Lobbying is one form of political activity."***
> ***—Board member, North Carolina***

The lobbying process is like a fad diet. You don't want to embark upon a diet without consulting your doctor, and you should not launch a lobbying effort without first consulting your legal experts and your state and national school boards associations.

State and federal statutes that relate to the lobbying process vary greatly in their application to various types of groups which seek to influence legislation. Most deal specifically with individuals and organizations engaged in the *business* of lobbying; that is, persons who represent an interest group and are *paid* to represent their employers on legislative matters.

Some lobby, others 'provide information'

In a legalistic sense, school board members are not lobbyists. Their actions fall within the province of "providing information," but are similar to the actions of a professional lobbyist. As one federal government relations employee explains it: "In a very broad sense, elected and appointed officials are lobbyists. They provide informational services for their legislators, but they also seek to influence the outcome of legislation. They can't avoid that, because part of their duty as public servants is to represent the views of their constituents on matters affecting their communities."

Most state and national associations that represent school board members cannot legally "lobby" due to their non-profit status as organizations. As one federal relations representative of the Washington, D.C.-based National School Boards Association explained: "The association exists to provide services to the membership. We don't lobby. There is a fine line between what I do and what a lobbyist does, but I am distinctly different from a lobbyist in the legal sense. We might be splitting some pretty fine hairs in terms of function, but what I do—and what the board members do here when they visit their congressmen—is to provide legislators and various agencies of the federal government information about education and its needs."

While most state and national school boards associations cannot lobby, they do provide information and organize legislative committees or networks of their members who serve the function of lobbyists.

Rather than splitting hairs or trying to straddle the fine line of defining terms, the next few pages will address a board's role in lobbying. The real topic being discussed, however, is communication and representation.

The board member as lobbyist

A lobbyist is essentially a communicator. In order to clearly present your views and those of your constituents to legislators, you will have to tap certain communication skills: being informed, cordial, respectful, practical, honest, realistic, *and* political.

Communicating from the base to the apex of a governmental pyramid is vital to ensure that local control of public education will be maintained. Your lobbying effort is one area where this bottom-to-top communication is critically important. There is one caveat, however, as a board member from Oregon notes: "Individually, we can be a great help to our legislators, because we can give our local perspective on the issues when the legislator calls us to bring an item of importance to our attention. Attempts to reach farther up the pyramid from the base of local control will involve joining efforts with other boards, citizen groups, and leaders with a vested interest in public education."

As a board member, you acquire a certain degree of political clout on your own. Although you are only one person, your legislators are likely to view you in terms of the larger numbers of the patrons you represent.

Obviously, as you join your efforts with larger groups, those numbers multiply. Thus, the more organized your lobbying efforts, the greater the impact of those efforts, and the greater the awareness of law and policy makers of the voices that speak in behalf of public education.

Organized lobbying

There are many outlets for organized lobbying efforts. Lobbying groups exist within your community, as well as at the state and federal levels.

From the parent organization of the National School Boards Association, a Federal Relations Network (FRN) of locally elected and appointed school board members has emerged to lobby for the interests of public education in general and their local constituents. Many of these board members are involved in legislative lobbying committees under the umbrella of their state school boards associations, and are appointed to the FRN by the state associations.

Why so much legislative involvement?

The number of laws mandated by state legislatures and the federal government—as well as regulations promulgated by state and federal departments of education—make it imperative for school boards to keep up with what's going on in the political arena.

Lobbying efforts, however, do not stop at the board level. Many school boards urge parent groups, special interest groups, business and service organizations, the League of Women Voters, and others to press for favorable legislative action on education matters.

How school board lobbying works best

Start locally. Most board members will rally around the concept of local control. When it comes to lobbying efforts, you should start with the local community. Then: Work up the pyramid.

One board member notes that, "Once you leave the board room, the only game in town is the state legislature." That's not entirely true, because education law and policy also are made at the national level. All kinds of national policy eventually filters down to the local district.

Focus on the state and national levels. After you've worked on *local* support for public education, your next target should be the state government. Try the personal approach. Says a Nevada board member: "Legislators tell me again and again that they're tired of hearing from our superintendent or from the executive director of the state school boards association. They see them as hired guns. It's us they want to hear from. There are some school board members who have a heck of a lot more votes behind them than any legislator in our state. These are school board members who are political people and who have a lot of support, and the legislators have a lot of respect for them."

Of course, your superintendent and state executive *can* aid your efforts to broaden the base of appeal. The primary reason your lobbying efforts should start at home, then go to the state, and then to the national level is this need for broad support.

At home, your board is one of a few—or perhaps the only—entities asking for a piece of the total budget, and its clout on legislative matters is at its greatest level. If you win the support of the leadership of your community, community members will help broaden your board's base when it moves to the state capital, where it becomes one of many entities seeking to influence legislation.

If your board and other boards and organizations win what you want at the state level, then you convert your legislators and governor to the cause of lobbying with you when you move to the national level—again becoming only one of an even larger group of entities seeking to influence governmental action.

"We have a school board advisory council and parent advisory council we can notify. They write letters and make personal contacts. We have a statewide network that enables us to reach and mobilize every district."
—Board member, Illinois

Tips on lobbying legislators

"Mr. Wilson, about your strategy for lobbying legislators ...."

Personal meetings with your legislators, writing letters and getting others to write to influence legislation, and testifying before legislative committees are all methods for influencing the laws and regulations that will influence the schools. Before pursuing such efforts, it's essential to master these lobbying basics:

Select your strategy. Each board's tactics vary, but whenever you mount a lobbying effort, the key is planning. Know what you want to accomplish, develop your priorities, and stick to the subject. As one lobbyist points out, "When everything is important, nothing is important."

Know how the legislative system works. The rules or operating procedures of any legislative body—including state boards of education and other government agencies—determine the timing and procedural process by which laws, rules, and regulations are made. You and your colleagues should spend a sufficient amount of time with basic textbooks dealing with national and state government to acquaint yourselves with the formal procedures of legislative bodies. You also should do some footwork with legislators and their personal and committee staffs to determine which informal procedures affect the process.

Use your basic communication skills. Often, lobbying involves nothing more than "catching more flies with honey than vinegar." When dealing with legislators, state boards, and other rule makers, state what you want clearly, be consistent, don't *assume* that you have understanding and agreement, be firm—but flexible—in your negotiations, avoid political "win and lose" situations, and keep in touch.

Build coalitions for broader-based support. Once you venture out of your own district to the state or federal level, your efforts can be diluted by the sheer numbers of others seeking access to and action from these legislative bodies. Investigate how you can have various community groups, state association legislative committees, and the Federal Relations Network of NSBA join your efforts.

You should approach these relationships with your goal firmly in mind, then decide if a coalition will help you succeed. You don't want to surrender your local control, but neither can you polarize around parochial interests if a coalition is your aim. If your issue is strictly your issue, pursue it alone.

However, if it is a broad issue of interest to all of public education, pursue a coalition. Knowing the difference is one key to your board's effectiveness.

One word of caution: As teachers and other groups have found, when the members of the same group do not agree on a position that best suits their interests, and—instead—lobby for *and* against an issue, they create a no-win situation. Many legislators have echoed the sentiments of one congressman who said: "Representatives of the same groups say they want one thing on one day; then the next day, another faction of the group says they want just the opposite. They neutralize each other and force me into a no-win posture. Sometimes I don't end up advocating or pursuing either side of the issue. They've shot down their own arguments."

When lobbying legislators, then, make sure that your message is as consistent as possible with other school board leaders. To do this, you must touch base with your state school boards association and the National School Boards Association.

For personal meetings

If you're going to lobby face-to-face with a state or national legislator or government official, remember that time is of the essence. Here are some tips that will make your visit productive without becoming a burden to the lawmaker's schedule:

Set an agenda. Pick one, two, or three items of particular interest. Save the rest for a later visit. Compile background information on the issues. Before the meeting, check on the status of legislation relevant to the issue. Your state and national school boards associations can help you. In fact, many school boards association staffers assert that it's sometimes crucial for board members to contact them *before* they venture out on their own. As one Florida association officer said: "When a board member contradicts what the association is speaking for, his remarks can negate all our efforts. We have found that a board member can be totally with us in principle, but address the issue in a way that confuses the legislator. If the board member calls us first, he or she can have the advantage of our research and the party line."

By narrowing your agenda to one or just a few issues, it will help you frame the "critical" nature of each issue with the legislator, and he can set an appropriate time frame for responding to your efforts.

Confirm your appointment before going to the meeting. Sometimes the press of business will force a legislator to alter the schedule. A confirmation will "put the legislator on the hook" for rescheduling, if a change is necessary.

Bring specific materials supporting your position. You will save time and words by presenting examples, charts, analytical materials, and shows of support. Let the legislator know you'll be calling to check if your materials have been read.

Follow up. Make that telephone call; write that letter. If the legislator is delegating the issue to a staff member, establish contact with that worker. Keep the legislator up to date on developments and changes affecting the issue.

Arrange other support. Have community groups, local officials, and others concerned about the issue contact the legislator on your behalf. If necessary, alert the media to your requests. The greater the interest in an issue, the greater your chances become for a positive response.

Letters to legislators

Many of the same rules applicable to personal contacts apply to your letter writing. Form and protocol also apply. Lobbying is, after all, a political activity; so play it to the hilt.

- Be clear and concise. Open your letter by addressing the issue and what you want.
- Identify any legislation involved by its name and number.
- Write one letter per issue. Don't obscure the process with overkill.
- Type the letter and use a business correspondence format.
- If it is an individual letter, use your signature and letterhead, but state that you are a board member. If it's the board's letter, have the president or the full board sign, and put it on the board's letterhead.
- Avoid form letters, if possible. A personal letter usually receives greater attention.
- Remain courteous. Don't threaten or cajole. Indicate how voting for your issue will be politically attractive to the legislator. He can figure out how the converse might be true.
- Include a return address and request a reply.
- Follow up with a "thank you" letter

when you win or if the legislator tried and lost.

- Use proper terms of address, such as "Dear Senator," "Dear Representative," or "Mr. Speaker" and "Mr. President." Use the proper—and full—address format. For national figures, the address formats are those below. For your state officials, consult the legislator's office or your state school boards association.

ADDRESS FORMATS:

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

(Name of Senator)
Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

(Name of Representative)
House of Representatives
Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

For participating in committee hearings

When considering the merits of a bill, a legislative committee holds at least one hearing to receive comments from experts and concerned citizens. You may be called upon to testify at one of these committee hearings, or you can request an opportunity to appear. Below are some tips on effectively presenting your case:

- Know your facts and figures. If there's something you don't know, admit it.
- If you promise to supplement the record with additional information, provide it promptly and refer to your testimony in a cover letter.
- Keep your testimony brief and to the point.
- State who you are and whether you are testifying *for* or *against* the proposed bill or simply providing information about the issue.
- Speak clearly and succinctly.
- Speak loudly enough to be heard, but don't shout, especially into a microphone.
- Make copies of your testimony available for committee members and the press.
- Don't get into arguments during testimony. Instead, make a note of any controversial point and discuss it after the hearing.
- Don't call legislators by their first names, no matter how well you know them.
- Speak directly to the committee members, not to the audience.

A final note

Some of the best—and worst—lessons on lobbying and the political process are taught in your own board room. Before you begin lobbying your state legislature or state board of education, study the methods and approaches that local "lobbyists" use to influence *your* decisions as a board member. The techniques that work best on you and your colleagues may prove helpful at the other levels of the legislative pyramid.

17

YOUR PERSONAL LIFE

"That's Charlie again!"

> ***"The responsibility for other people weighs very heavily sometimes."***
> ***—Board member, Tennessee***

When you thought about becoming a school board member, you probably anticipated that being a board member would somehow change your life. You may or may not have given considerable thought to what board service would really mean to your personal life. But you probably did not realize just how much impact this new venture would have on your life, the demands that would be made on your time and energy, or the accommodations you would have to make in order to meet those demands.

As a school board member, you're responsible for two of the most important things to the citizens of your community: their children and their money. You and your board also have the power to influence the earning power of those employed by your district and, consequently, the quality of their lives.

You can't deal with people's families, pocketbooks, or careers without becoming personally involved. Your constituents will be on your doorstep with their opinions and concerns. They will call you on the phone. They will greet you in the supermarket, at the bank, and on the street. They will talk to your friends, your spouse, and your children. They will try to reach you and influence your decisions in numerous ways.

If you do a decent job of managing the effects of public service on your private life, your board service can be rewarding and enjoyable. If, however, you let your board service overwhelm your personal life and relationships, you'll end up resigning before your first term is completed, or much sooner than you had thought you would. If you don't quit, you will be plagued with a constant impulse to quit. In this situation, as with any job you've got that you don't want, your performance as a school board member will be less than your best.

The problems you might encounter

"When you come on the board, you have a tendency to say Yes to everybody just so you can be the happy, jolly person you always were. Well, you soon find that this just doesn't work. Everything you do displeases somebody, and you soon lose a lot of your so-called friends." —Board member, Montana

Regardless of how effective, efficient, and collected you may be, you will not be able to escape all of the menacing effects school board service can have on your personal life. As one school board veteran put it: "You can't live vicariously as a board member. You can't stand on the side and watch. You're going to be involved; you're going to care. You can't do that without having it take its toll on you."

When you encounter some of the bugaboos of board service, you may be inclined—as some board members are—to think that these are unique to you. At times, if you are trudging through problems that your board colleagues appear to be flying through, you even may judge your capabilities inferior to theirs. You may feel alone.

You are never really alone. Board service means different things to different people, depending on their personalities, circumstances, and commitment. There are a myriad of troubles that plague *many* board members, and these can be categorized.

As with any problem, dealing with the more unfortunate effects of school board service begins with recognition. Some of the most common board member afflictions which, if left unacknowledged and unattended, can destroy *any* board member, include problems with time, isolation, stress, finances, abuse, frustration, and fatigue.

Out of time

Board members cite *time* as the number one culprit in wreaking havoc on their personal and business lives. Regular meetings of the board are just the beginning. There are special meetings, committee meetings, emergency meetings, executive sessions, orientation sessions, workshops, and conventions. In addition, it takes time to prepare speeches, speak with government representatives and address government agencies, read reports, visit schools, and attend school and social functions. Add these to a life that may already include job, family, community, and religious commitments, and you have a tremendous time problem.

To make matters worse, time management is an area in which board members have had little or no formal training. They have not learned techniques for integrating the increased time requirements of public office with the demands of their personal and business lives. Managing time poorly causes stress, loss of control, and fatigue. It affects all relationships and everything a person does.

"Time is the most stressful thing to deal with. There's just never enough." —Board member, South Carolina

"It drives me up the wall when our board members sit and debate an issue for hours when the issue seems so clear-cut." —Board member, Alaska

The amount of paperwork can get you down.

> ***"It's frustrating when there's a decision I want made and the rest of the board couldn't care less about the issue."***
> ***—Board member, New Mexico***

Lonely

The cliche, "It's lonely at the top," holds especially true for school board members. As a board member, you're forced to make some unpopular decisions, decisions that will alienate friends and cause neighbors to avoid you. Although board members make decisions as a collective body, school boards are made up of individuals who reach decisions all alone. Seldom do you receive the emotional support and comfort you may need from others. It's not uncommon to receive the deep freeze treatment from teachers, administrators, parents, and students. Often, the recognition and appreciation of a job done well is missing.

Another facet of school board service deals with keeping confidences, itself an act of solitude. It is not proper to discuss publicly many of the subjects with which a board deals, such as personnel or labor relations matters. Not being able to communicate about these things creates an unsettling feeling of being alone.

Stressed and strained

Lack of time and isolation are not the only things that cause board members stress. As one board member said, "Just serving on a board generates stress, and there is no escaping it." Contract negotiations, public hearings, and controversial issues like desegregation, busing, boundary changes, and school closings are guaranteed to cause stress. Even routine board meetings become stressful when board interaction becomes entangled with personality conflicts and hidden agendas.

> ***"I get nervous when we take a vote on something that hasn't been adequately researched. Then, I literally resent myself for going along with the others."***
> ***—Board member, Kentucky***

Feelings of frustration are generated from numerous sources; but both new and veteran board members find many of the same things a strain:

- The inability to deal with ambiguity.
- Having to answer to many masters (state and federal governments, the courts, parents, taxpayers, teachers, students) and finding it impossible to satisfy all of them.
- Wanting to accomplish a lot, but feeling that you're spinning your wheels.
- Making tough decisions with too little information or time to consider alternatives.
- Having too little money, and too many demands for services.
- Coping with citizen committees who do not understand their purposes and the limits of their authority.
- Dealing with the local news media who seem determined to put words in your mouth or twist the meaning of what you say.
- Butting heads with other local officials.
- Fighting with teacher organizations and undergoing the collective bargaining process.
- Poor relationships with board colleagues and school administrators.
- Declining board authority.
- Having to comply with state and federal mandates and court rulings when this is contrary to what you believe in or want to do.

> ***"I get steamed when I come prepared to vote on an issue only to find it once again open for discussion."***
> ***—Board member, Pennsylvania***

People in general are just now beginning to learn to cope with stress caused by everyday reality. Few board members have developed the techniques to cope with the stress caused by board service. Being uptight about school board business can ruin your relationships with your family, and can cause you problems at work. Inordinate stress can ruin your health.

Financially drained

School board service can affect more than your nerves, it can hit you in the pocketbook. It may require unpaid time away from work, for instance. If you run your own business, you have less time to spend wooing clients. There's less time to pursue professional memberships and development which could mean additions to your annual income.

> ***"I have not been able to attend the monthly meetings of my professional organization because they were held on the same night as our board meetings. This has had an impact on my business relationships."***
> ***—Board member, New York***

There's a little known side effect of board service that can be just as costly as lost time: loss of business or sales due to conflict of interest. As one Texas board member explains, being a board member doesn't just affect a board member's business and employment, but affects that of the board member's spouse and relatives. As his spouse reports: "The school district cannot legally conduct business with my husband's car dealership, for example, and there is no recompense for the lost sales. And then there was the board's decision to fire a high school football coach. That cost my husband more additional sales and untold goodwill in the local coffee shop. What's more, I have several relatives who are teachers, but cannot work in the local public schools because of state nepotism laws."

Treated differently

Once people become board members, they somehow are set apart from the rest of the community. Board members

"He won't be in today, Mr. Wilson—he woke up feeling insecure after working on the school board's policy on bomb scares last night."

"One of my daughter's teachers keeps calling her by my name—and the teacher and I aren't on a first-name basis. It's a minor annoyance, but it rankles."
—Board member, California

"You must satisfy all these people who know nothing about running a school. In one phrase, I can explain it all: 'one thankless job.'"
—Board member, Maryland

and their spouses and children often are viewed in a different light by friends, neighbors, community leaders, and district personnel. People are more likely to ask them for favors and blame them personally for things that go wrong with the schools.

When citizens or staff dislike what a board does, they usually let the individual board member know it. They may also let members of the board member's family know about it. *Example:* Few teachers make a habit of taking their frustrations out on a board member's child who happens to be in their class. But when a teacher who is unhappy with board action knows that a student's parent is a board member, the teacher is more likely to mention his displeasure with the board in the student's presence. A few teachers will confront the student directly with how they feel about a parent's actions. Once a parent becomes a board member, this fact does not go unnoticed by the teachers. The board member's child is different from the rest. His parent can pull strings—make life better or worse for that teacher.

Abused

School officials, like other public figures, increasingly are becoming the whipping boys for what's wrong with the world. The burden of dealing with the social problems of their communities and with other issues that are not directly related to education can be a back breaker. Issues such as desegregation, busing, school boundary changes, drug education, school closings, sex education, discipline, and contract negotiations are emotional, volatile ones that can marshal people to attend board meetings for the purpose of embarrassing the school board.

Some angry constituents might not want to inflict bodily harm, but might try to make things uncomfortable for school board members as a means of pressuring them to vote a certain way. During board meetings, these distraught constituents will employ a variety of methods to upset decorum. They might shout, hurl epithets, or overwhelm a meeting with massive numbers of people. When sufficiently aroused, some malcontents have been known to harass board members or their families with threatening telephone calls, egg throwing, poison-pen letters, and even pickets around their homes or places of employment.

Such tactics not only strain the patience of board members, but drain their energies, raise their tension levels, cause them to lose sleep, and bring about board member burnout.

Burned out

Board members become burned out due to an imbalance of effort extended and return on effort. People come to the school board with great anticipation and expectations. They often do not know the limitations that are placed on boards today—the rules and regulations with which they must comply, and the financial and other roadblocks that will impede accomplishing their objectives. When board members do not see the kind of results they desire from all their time and effort, they can go sour on the whole idea of board service.

Without a sense of accomplishment, the late night meetings, the phone calls at all hours, the lack of privacy, and the time away from friends and family aren't worth it.

"When a school board member's child is an A or B student, a class leader, and generally 'a good kid,' being a school board member with a child in school doesn't present any problems. But if a child has even slight problems with drugs, family life, attendance, grades, or behavior—that board member and his child are very vulnerable and will likely experience unusual social pressure, extreme discipline, back-biting, and more."
—Board member, Ohio

"About five years ago, our house was picketed. There wasn't any violence, but we were subjected to a good deal of obscene shouting. The children were young, but they still remember and talk about those days."
—Board member, Massachusetts

The benefits of board service

"When I was a child, a priest coached me in football. When I endeavored to thank him for his time, he asked me to show my thanks by helping boys and girls when I became a man. We owe our services to the young."
—Board member, Indiana

"I've had 30 years in education. I'm a retired teacher and science supervisor. Now I'm on the other side of the fence. My main effort is to get everybody in the district to expect better achievement from the students."
—Board member, Hawaii

With the abuse, the burnout, the time constraints, the stress, and the detrimental effects board service can have on business and family, why are there 95,000 Americans serving on public school boards at any given time?

Some people have specific reasons for becoming board members, such as firing the superintendent, cutting the budget, or trying to implement a program of special interest to them. The reasons most people serve on school boards, however, are twofold: one of *give* and another of *take*.

Giving

Many board members view school board service as an opportunity to perform their civic duty and to help children. They speak of the *proud tradition* of being public servants. As one South Dakota board member explained, "Our public schools were made great by volunteer boards....I feel I owe my services to the community for the many services I get." A Pennsylvania board member explained that he felt a *moral commitment* to serve. "I've been given a certain amount of talents to use and I will be held accountable for using them."

Being able to give their time, effort, knowledge, and skills is in itself a form of compensation to board members. But it's also a way of helping to reach education and living ideals worldwide. One Colorado board member explained: "I feel I'm contributing something to the future of this community, to the country, and to the world. Our graduates become surgeons, contractors, and teachers. I'm contributing to their future and my future."

Taking

The act of giving lends itself to taking. If you help your community accomplish what it sets out to do, you can take personal satisfaction in that accomplishment.

Board members find it satisfying to be able to make a change in the schools and their communities; and they enjoy the feedback they get from citizens, parents, teachers, and students. "When a student gets a scholarship or is accepted into West Point, it's a return on your investment of time. You know you had a little something to do with it," explained a Kansas board member.

Board members themselves experience personal growth and development. "Although I am unpaid, I refuse to consider the job a thankless one. As a result of my service, I've found new sources of strength in myself and I can see my growth as an individual," one board member said.

For the children

Board members who are parents gain some peace of mind by serving on the board. They become knowledgeable about school programs, they get to know the people responsible for those programs, and they have a sense that they can affect the quality of education that will be available to their children.

For many board members' children, their parents' service often serves as an introduction to public service. "My children learned that there are satisfactions in public service, because they have seen it," said one board member. "They have also learned a respect for it in terms of the amount of time that board members give."

There are other benefits of board service to a board member's offspring. A primary one is that the children learn to be more independent. Among other skills, they learn to prepare family meals, wash the dishes, and do the laundry.

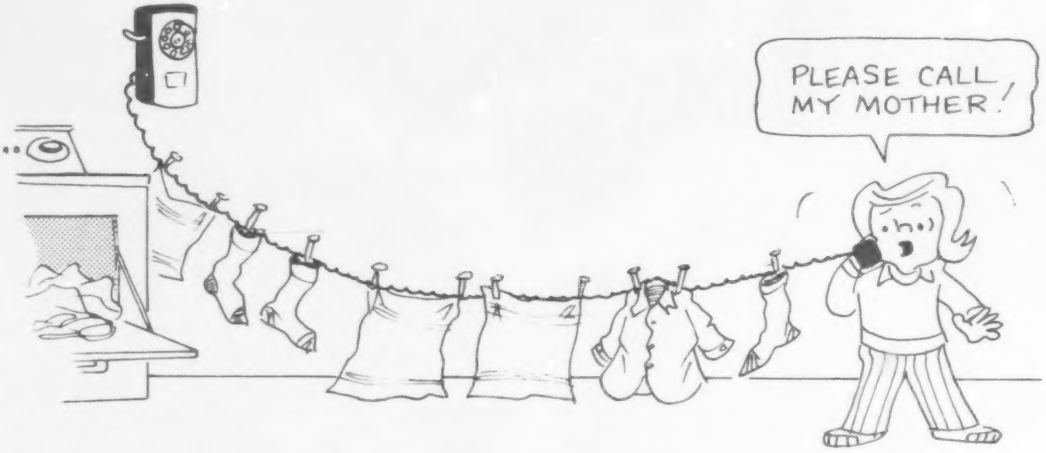
They also learn receptionist skills—how to answer the phone and record a message. One board member explained some guidelines she gave her children to help them in this task: "I knew my children would be involved in public relations the minute they answered the phone. I coached them on how to use the telephone properly. I told them that if they chose to answer the phone, their responsibility was to be courteous and to make a record of the call. I taught them not to respond to questions about the schools that adults ask them, but to tell them, 'Please call my mother.' This way, the adults do not exploit my children, and it keeps the children from saying something that they shouldn't say or comment on."

Another board member explained that his children learned very early on in his board service that they were going to have to fight their own bat-

"People ask me why I spend so much time. 'What do you want to do all that free service for?' they ask. I say: 'Well basically, I'm selfish.... It is a self-education for me."
—Board member, Kansas

"Serving on the board has been something that sets me apart from my family, but that I feel good about. It has fed my ego, I suppose, and improved my self-esteem."
—Board member, Tennessee

"When you deal with the students themselves, you feel you are doing something worthwhile. I don't feel this at many board meetings, but I do feel it when I meet with the students."
—Board member, Iowa


PLEASE CALL MY MOTHER!

"As far as my children are concerned, they need to know two things: (1) that you have an obligation to 'give' to your community; and (2) that you have a life other than as a parent. I think I'm making my contribution; I still think of board service as a privilege, and my children understand that." —Board member, Illinois

tles. "As long as I was on the school board, I was not going to interfere and have any shadow of trying to influence things in their direction, one way or another." His children learned to be responsible for their own actions.

Children who assist their parents in meeting the demands of board service feel a sense of usefulness and accomplishment. When all members of the family pitch in to help a beleaguered board member, the family actually can be drawn closer together, instead of being split by the time and other demands of board service.

TIPS FOR MIXING FAMILY LIFE WITH BOARD LIFE

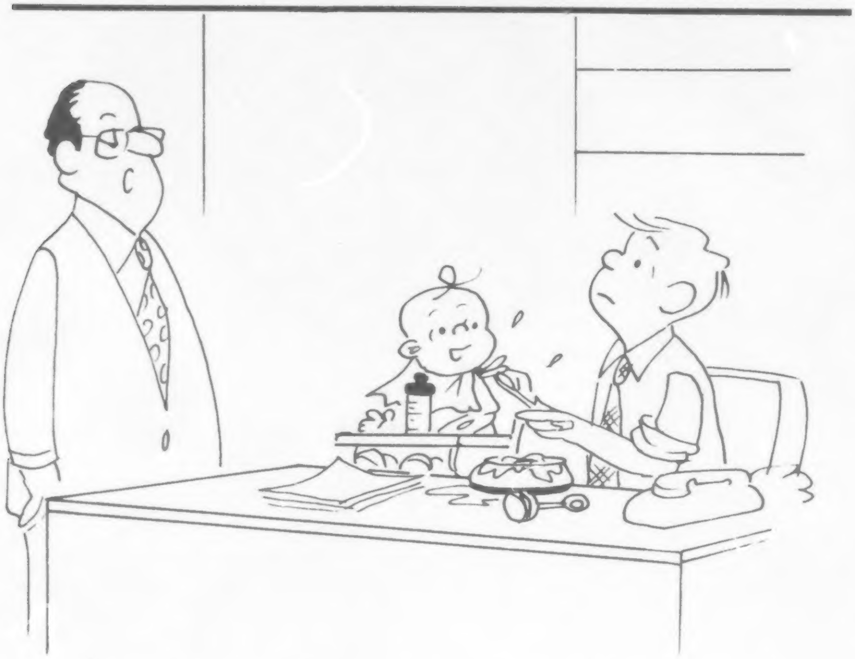
Board members who serve term after term understand both the costs and the benefits of service. They work to keep their public life from ruining their family life, and vice versa. They learn to help family members cope with their board life, and they formulate good strategies for helping family members assist them in this community role.

These tips may help you:

Constantly solicit the understanding and support of your spouse. The effect of board service on family life is directly related to the cooperation a board member has from his or her spouse. One California board member explains: "The cooperation of your spouse makes the difference in how your children will be able to cope with your being a board member. If your spouse doesn't openly support your work as a school board member, your children might see your being a board member as something bad. You're going to get more attention and publicity. If your spouse gets jealous and exhibits competitive feelings, your children are going to recognize this, and they might react negatively."

"There's a special school board meeting tonight, so I'll grab a quick snack on the way."

Be appreciative. Some spouses enjoy helping with board service duties. They take pleasure in attending school activities, school board workshops, and conventions. Some even help with research. You shouldn't expect this, although there are some areas in which a spouse must lend support. For instance, if a board member is also a parent, and live-in help is out of the question, the spouse *has* to pitch in. As one spouse of a Maryland board member explains: "Our children are young, so when my wife has an evening board meeting, I must leave the office promptly at 5 p.m., or arrange for someone to stay with the children until I get home." In this instance, a wife's school board duties means that the husband babysits a lot, including the times he keeps the children amused while constituents



"Cranston, I understand your wife is on the local school board ...."

gather in their home. If this or something similar is the case in your house, don't forget to be appreciative.

Develop techniques for handling board-related interruptions. Calls to your home, as well as the number of people who will stop by to drop off material or to chat, will increase sharply. Board members sometimes receive 20 or 30 calls a week. Some of these can be disposed of in a few minutes; others take up to an hour. You can't remain accessible to the public with a closed front door and an unlisted telephone number, but you can try to manage interruptions.

For instance, if a call comes during supper, you shouldn't be bashful about telling the caller that you're eating. Ask if you can return the call later. Some board members turn off the telephone briefly when necessary, while others have invested in automatic telephone answering machines that announce when they will be free and take messages.

For those people who like to call on you in person, establish up front that your door is always open, but that you do have a personal life and would prefer that they call first and set up an appointment. As one board member says, "This is not only good for me, but it's better for them. This way, they can be assured that they will have my full attention."

Be reasonable. Board work is important work, but it shouldn't dominate your life or the lives of the members of your family. It's important to discuss with your family the demands of board service—such as those placed on your time and your energy. Ideally, you will have done this before you took office. Plan together how your board service can best be integrated with family life. Decide how much time you can reasonably give to the board. See if your spouse can live with that decision. Talk about rearranging any schedules that can be rearranged, and about sharing household tasks.

Help your family cope. Your children and spouse may be approached by people who have questions or who want favors. Remind them that they don't have to respond to such requests. Suggest they bow out of a discussion by politely saying, "I don't know anything about that, you'll have to talk to my dad." You also might explain to them that your being a board member doesn't make them privileged in any way; that they can't do anything different because you're on the board.

Make the most of the time you have. As a board member, the *quantity* of time you will be able to spend with your family will suffer, but you can minimize the effects of this by working to improve the *quality* of that time. One board member explains: "Before I became a board member, I was at home full time with the children. I would be on the telephone or busy around the house, and I would think nothing of shooing the children away. Now, I am conscious of the times that I'm gone from home, and I try to devote more direct attention to my kids. I set aside inviolate periods to share only with my family. Sundays, for instance, are sacred. Barring emergencies, we do not make plans away from the children on Sunday—something we didn't always do before I was on the board."

Often, with older children, it's more difficult to coordinate the time you have available with the time they have available. The best you can do, veterans say, is to make an offer to spend some time together and let them choose what they want to do—just as you've chosen to serve on the board.

How to manage your time as a board member

"Unless you're in a big city or going through a crisis, if you find yourself in a board meeting every other day, I would think that either the board needs to be changed or the superintendent needs to be changed."
—Board member, Ohio

Making the most of your time is essential. Finding time to get things done and having enough time to satisfy all the demands of your board, personal, and business commitments will be a continuous challenge. You've added a new role and more responsibilities to your life, but the number of hours in a day hasn't increased. If you don't manage your time, you can become badly over-committed and, eventually, frustrated. The pressure of time is the number one reason most board members give for quitting school board service.

Of course, you don't want to be *preoccupied* with time management—making time schedules and to-do lists, and keeping a time log and an eye on the clock. This won't help you accomplish more, and can be counterproductive. *Flexibility* is also essential.

Not an innate skill

No one is born with the ability to manage time. It's a skill that must be learned and practiced.

For most of us, *mismanaging* time seems to come quite naturally. Public officials also seem to get a lot of help when it comes to using up time. Constituents serve to provide constant interruptions, breaking your concentration and keeping you from finishing what you start. Unprepared colleagues on the board can cause meetings to be longer than they need to be. School administrators can load you up with unnecessary paper work or call you to make decisions on administrative matters which are their responsibility.

Here's what to do

The first step to better time management is to make a commitment to better time management. You have to take time to think about time—about what you can and cannot do within a certain period of time. You must assess what you *want* to do, what you *have* to do, how much time you have in which to do those things, and how you can get them all done.

You've got to have a plan. You've got to figure out what's taking up most of your time, think about what you want to accomplish, and then determine priorities. In addition, you'll need to learn to eliminate those things in your life that waste your time—things that don't merit the precious time that is given to them. You must work to rid your life of disorganization and unnecessary paper work.

Develop a sense of time. Time is a precious commodity and should be used with discretion. First determine how you spend your time. Keep a simple diary for several weeks, logging in how you spend your daytime and nighttime hours. You might find that your own rough estimates of how you spend your time don't match reality. People often overestimate the amount of time they spend on unpleasant or difficult tasks, and underestimate the time devoted to pleasant projects.

When examining your diary, can you honestly say you're spending your time the way you want to? Is the amount of time you spend on a project worth the time you put into it? Is there a noticeable return for your investment of time? Is most of your time and effort used to fulfill or further your personal goals and objectives? If not, you've got some adjustments to make.

Define your goals, establish priorities. If you can't answer Yes to the questions above, or if you are unsure, then examine your goals and priorities. Knowing what you expect to do today, tomorrow, next week, or next year is crucial in using time wisely.

When establishing goals, be specific about what you want. If your goals are abstract ("I want to be a good board member"), you won't know how to achieve them. Don't set goals which are too limited or trivial, and don't set too many goals. *Do* be flexible: Review your goals and, if one is no longer feasible, abandon it.

When establishing priorities, look at your many interests and needs, determine your goals as they relate to your interests and needs, and categorize your goals and put them into a time frame. Ask yourself, "Which do I want to accomplish, when?"

Learn to say No. Once you have your goals and priorities in place, it should be easier to say No. For most of us, it's hard to say No. People say Yes without fully assessing whether the request is something they want or need to do.

"Although you'll want to keep everything you may need, you will need to be selective in your filing. Most important documents are filed permanently in the school district where you can find them if you need them. There's no need to file something that is easily accessible somewhere else." —Board member, Wisconsin

Before saying, "Yes, I will head up a committee"; "Yes, I will attend a meeting"; "Yes, I will give a speech"; or "Yes, I will look into that," determine whether the activity fits into your objectives, and if it will be worth the time you likely will have to put into it.

Organize your materials. A lot of board members are "pack rats"—they like to keep every piece of information about boardsmanship and education that comes their way. As one board member says: "It saves me time if I have everything I need right at my fingertips. I never know when I might need it." Such board members keep copies of board minutes, current contracts, and background material pertaining to board committee work.

For some board members, however, the opposite is true. They prefer, they say, to leave the management of paper up to the administration. Their back-up materials and past agendas are kept in the board's or superintendent's office.

If you are going to keep some board-related materials, you'll need to develop a filing and paper-sorting system. Because everyone works differently, you will need to organize on the basis of your most effective way of working, but here are some tips to get you started:

- In boxes or file cabinets, keep general subject files for committee reports and miscellaneous communication. Topic headings can correspond to the major categories of the district's board policy manual, such as "Finance," "Curriculum," and "Personnel."
- Maintain a chronological file by month for agendas and back-up materials.
- In file folders, organize action files with topic headings, such as "Pending," "Priority," or "Next Meeting."

"As a 'welcome aboard' gift, our district supplies each board member with his own metal file cabinet. Although we're not paid, we do a lot of important work, and such things as filing cabinets are important working tools." —Board member, North Carolina

Handle paperwork only once. You really waste time if you rehandle every piece of paper that comes your way, especially when some items shouldn't be handled at all! You also can lose a lot of time looking for misplaced material.

To save yourself some time and headaches, sort all paper into the following categories:

- *Immediate action items.* Those you need to read and take immediate action on in order to dispense with the piece of paper.
- *Pending action items.* Those on which you can't take immediate action, but which can be placed in a pending file. File pending items only after you have initiated some action on them.

"What's this grocery list doing in my priority file?"

- *Items to be read, filed, distributed, or tossed.* These you read or skim for information only. Be considerate of others' time, and distribute only those items you are confident will be of benefit. If an item needs to be filed, do so immediately. If an item is of no value, toss it into "file 13."

Master the telephone. Used wisely, the telephone can speed communication and save you time. Used unwisely, this technological wonder can intrude, interrupt, cause tension, and devour your time.

It's astounding the way most people react to their telephone. They feel compelled to answer it. At a time when they wouldn't dream of receiving a visitor, they automatically reach for a ringing phone. These are some tips for maximizing the use of your telephone and getting the most out of the time you spend on it:

- When the phone rings, let the caller know immediately if it's an inconvenient time for you.
- When someone calls, find out quickly exactly why he is calling, so you can decide if you can handle it on the spot.
- If it's a school matter, subtly minimize socializing.
- If the caller needs some information, respond quickly and succinctly if you can.

- ○ If you sense a problem, distress, or a need for discussion, prescribe a way to address that need—such as by having a meeting or returning the call when you have more time or information.
- ○ Utilize a telephone answering device that records messages.

To save time when you're the one making the calls, make most of your calls at one time. Select a time when you think people will be available, so you don't waste time with return calls. Once you get your party on the line, set the tone for the call by indicating your own time limitations and saying up front what you want and need. Phrases like, "I only have a minute, but. . . ." or "I just have a quick question" are good openers.

Delegate what you can. As a board member, there are numerous things you have to "check out." A lot of research and leg work, though, can be properly delegated to the administrative staff. Proper delegation is a part of the relationship between the board and the administration. If board members are involved in administrative detail, they will have little time to do much else.

***"Sometimes, I get my wife to yell at me that dinner's ready or that I'm needed to do something when it's obvious that I'm trapped by a caller who's long-winded."* —Board member, Delaware**

SUGGESTION

If you are a new board member, you can save time from the start if you learn as much as you can about the school system as soon as you can. Primarily, you need to learn what channels to go through for information, since this constitutes much of the actual work you do on the board. You need to take personal responsibility for your orientation to the board. Ask the administrative staff for reports, talk to people in the district, and listen and learn from your colleagues.

TIME WASTER'S TEST

Are you or your board guilty of these time wasters? By eliminating such time wasters as these, you will have more time to be effective school board leaders.

You

- ☐ Are disorganized in your personal life—with cluttered drawers, cluttered files or no files, messy desk, and so on.
- ☐ Make appointments, miss them, then have to reschedule them.
- ☐ Are always late to meetings.
- ☐ Are poorly prepared for meetings. Do not read back-up material.
- ☐ Volunteer for tasks someone else could do more easily or who *should* do the tasks.
- ☐ Are often tired and unable to concentrate.
- ☐ Are preoccupied with own thoughts and problems when trying to make decisions.
- ☐ Have poor communication. Are unsure of what others mean, and find others often mistake what you mean.
- ☐ Have many conversations that ramble—in meetings and over the telephone.
- ☐ Discuss issues for the sake of displaying knowledge.
- ☐ Oversell an issue when there's already support for it.
- ☐ Politic at board meetings.

Your board

- ☐ Designates few goals, and doesn't have specific plans for meeting goals.
- ☐ Has incomplete, inaccurate, or unuseable information.
- ☐ Has many discussions that ramble.
- ☐ Has unnecessary meetings, informal meetings without agendas, or too many business "get togethers" without direction.
- ☐ Holds up meetings for late-comers.
- ☐ Has inadequate agendas and written policies.
- ☐ Tables agenda items after long discussion.
- ☐ Fails to set and observe meeting time limits.
- ☐ Fails to observe rules of order.
- ☐ Has personal bickering at meetings.
- ☐ Rehashes the same old issues at meetings.
- ☐ Is always coping with new or recurrent "crises."

LOOKING AHEAD WILL SAVE YOU TIME

The school calendar, prepared for distribution to students, faculty, and parents, is one guide to a board member about what will occupy his time.

To help plan *your* school year, you'll need to find out what is required of you. After each item on the school calendar, ask yourself:

- ○ Will I have to attend a planning session, meeting, or event related to this?
- ○ Will this be a subject of board discussion? When?
- ○ Will I have to do advance reading about this?
- ○ Will this be a topic of concern at budget time?
- ○ Will this be a topic of concern when the board evaluates the superintendent or itself?

There are matters in a district which are not likely to be on the calendar, but which do affect the board. These i[illegible] preparation cycles, salary negotiations [illegible] board retreats. Talk with staff and [illegible] these. Get a feel for what is expected [illegible] each event. What do you need to do before, [illegible] and after each?

Strategies for coping with stress

"But I thought a bongo drum would relieve my tensions at board meetings."

Some school board members have a tendency to get so wrapped up in the concerns of the school district and staff that they forget about themselves. Before they know it, they are feeling rotten. They feel that they can't keep up, and that they're not accomplishing what they set out to do. They throw themselves *at* things instead of *into* things; and what should be seen as worthwhile challenges become overwhelming, never-ending problems. They wonder, "What's happened?"

What happens to school board members is that they are faced with constant pressures from all sides: the family, the public, school staff, the job. They become trapped into responding to these *external* pressures and they don't acknowledge or try to relieve their own *internal* pressures. Left unacknowledged and unattended, the internal pressure—the stress—adds up.

Just what is stress?

About 20 years ago, a physician named Hans Selye borrowed a term from physics and engineering and attached it to something people had been facing for years—*STRESS*. Stress was nothing new, but because it dealt somehow with mental health, it was not something that people talked about openly. Selye gave this common, everyday problem a name, a definition, and a scientific base, and began the process of opening doors to coping with it.

Everyone experiences stress. Stress isn't always bad, and you can't eliminate it. If you eliminated all stress from your life, you'd be emotionally dead.

If you're like many school board members, you're a hard-driving person with high ambitions and great expectations, and you're going to put yourself into many stressful situations. Held in control, a certain amount of stress can be good for you. You can use it to your advantage to supply a competitive edge when performing any task. Too much stress, though, can limit your performance and take away motivation.

You know you're under *too much* stress when you experience constant insomnia, short temper, backaches, headaches, or stomach problems. Unrelenting stress has been linked to high blood pressure, allergies, arthritis, heart attack, chronic depression, alcoholism, drug addiction, and other potentially fatal conditions.

"You've just got to learn that a school system works slowly, and that good things just don't happen overnight; crises do, but you've got to wait for the constructive things."
—Board member, New Jersey

"School board members have to realize that they can't be all things to all people. They need to choose several specific targets for each school year; adopt a time schedule; and, whenever they reach a goal, they should celebrate their success."
—Board member, Oregon

***"I compartmentalize what I'm doing. I'm very active in my own business, and with board business; but I have the capacity to go through the door and close it behind me."* —Board member, New York**

What to do about it

Since Dr. Selye brought stress out of the closet, printing presses have poured out dozens of books on coping with stress. Such books outline general stress-coping techniques, such as:

○ Tuning into those things that cause you stress.
○ Exercising for at least 20 minutes a day to release pent-up emotions.
○ Creating a pleasing environment at work and at home.
○ Taking a day or longer vacation—to get away from it all.
○ Relaxing, doing yoga, and meditating.
○ Engaging in a hobby.

Two major keys to managing stress are *patience* and *perspective*.

Regarding perspective, one board member says she learned the art of "jumping outside herself"—to step back in the middle of a situation and ask: "What's happening? What am I doing? What am I thinking?"

A New York board member explains how he learned to bite his tongue, not to say, "I told you so," when a board colleague suggests the identical thing to solve a problem that he had suggested years before to prevent a problem—but which had not passed on his recommendation. "It's more important that your colleague thinks that it's his own idea that he's sold on. You should be happy because what you wanted is coming to fruition."

***"Try to monitor your internal pressures—how you feel when you realize you're over-scheduled again, how you react when your family feels neglected. Deal with these feelings and they won't do you in."* —Board member, Arkansas**

To keep stress levels from rising, board members also advise:

Leave as many problems as possible in the board room. Although people will seek your assistance outside of the board room, your real authority as a board member exists when you meet as a board. When possible (on issues not of a personal or explosive nature), bring concerns to your board meetings, thus limiting the time you spend on them outside the board room. Also, after board meetings, take time to decompress. Turn up the car radio and sing along; take a long way home. Leave the issues discussed in the board room—*in* the board room. Don't dwell on them in personal conversations, and don't allow board concerns to become family table talk.

Build a support group. One way to lose perspective is to be immersed in your problems and your district's problems. Relationships are an important way to get a needed distance from yourself. Identify board members and individuals at work to whom you can turn when you're frustrated; people who can empathize and those who can sympathize.

It's often valuable to find someone to talk to who is separate from a particular circumstance, someone who can respond objectively to a situation and help you get a better perspective on the problem. In the case of board-related issues, talking to board members and administrators from other districts and states is helpful. You'll discover common problems, maybe common solutions to these problems and, possibly, a sense that you're not alone in what you're going through.

Make sure your personal life is in order. Block out time for your family and make sure that board business and other business don't enter into that time. Your family can be your greatest source of support in difficult times.

Prepare yourself for hostile encounters. Board members should be prepared for confrontations. Keep a finger on the pulse of the staff and the community. When you sense turbulence, arm yourself with facts and information. Preparing for such encounters makes the actual meetings less awesome.

Seek help. Board members groan daily about the increased pressures and demands placed on them. But face it, groaning doesn't make things better. You should give serious consideration to participation in in-service programs on stress management geared solely for school board members. Seeking training in listening skills, in handling complaints, and in conflict resolution is also essential.

Learn to relax. Most of the stress you will experience as a board member will be caused by your *response* to school board circumstances, rather than by the circumstances themselves. You may need to adjust your way of looking at school board concerns. For example, school board business is serious, but there are some things that are more significant than others. Learn to sort out major problems from minor ones, and to use your energies to solve the former.

Regulate your time, try to avoid marathon meetings, and refuse to work unreasonably long hours. Recognize your limitations, acknowledge your dispensability, don't try to be all things to all people, and don't internalize complaints about the board and your board

***"Don't be fooled into believing that tension is avoidable. Most people deceive themselves by saying that they are calm or that stress does not bother them and they can learn to cope with it. If things get you mad, say so. It's harmful to tell people, 'No, I'm not mad, I'm not annoyed at all,' when in fact you are. Tell them flat out, 'I'm as mad as you-know-what.' Try it, it's therapy for the soul."* —Superintendent, California**

actions. If you find that school board matters are becoming more than you can handle, assert control over the pressures placed on you by outside forces *and* by yourself.

Don't over-commit yourself. Board members trap and frustrate themselves when they take a stand on an issue before knowing all sides of it. Too many commitments to too many things also cause stress.

SUGGESTION

For new board members: *Since stress can come from not knowing what's expected of you, and from not knowing what to do and how to do it—do what more and more professionals are doing:* Get a mentor. *Seek out another member of your board (or a former board member) who can teach, guide, inspire, and encourage you.*

When to leave board service

"My slim chances for reelection were quietly discussed. Why did I leave? Pride—that's why!" —Board member, New York

"Do you think it's time to quit the board?"

"I wouldn't have run for reelection, but the new building was not complete or satisfactory. I was one of two people who had worked on the project from the start, and I felt an obligation to remain until certain problems were resolved." —Board member, Vermont

It doesn't take people long to learn that being a school board member isn't the easiest job they've ever had. When the pressure is on—and sometimes it's on all the time—board members, like other normal human beings, want to throw in the towel. "Who needs this?" some constantly ask themselves.

Many board members keep on asking this question—and keep on being board members. They are addicted to being board members, or they are dedicated to getting something done or solving a particular problem.

About 25 percent of board members quit before their term is up. Most board members who do quit agonize over the decision for a couple of years. In general, they say they have a strong sense of completing what they obligated themselves to do. As one ex-board member says, "I felt it my duty, since being elected by the people to serve.". And, as another explains, "I thought about quitting, but I hesitated because I didn't want to be called a quitter."

When to call it quits

There is a time and a place for everything, and there is a time when each board member decides to quit. There are exceptions of course. There are a few states which limit the amount of time a board member can serve. There are board members who don't have a choice in the matter: They don't get reelected or reappointed, they get recalled, or they move out of the district and no longer meet the legal requirements for being a board member. Some board members have to quit because of poor health.

If you are a board member who has a choice, there are no set guidelines to assist you in determining how long you should stay on the board. Obviously, leaving board service is a very personal act, and your reasons will be your own.

"No one is indispensable. I feel 12 years is long enough for service in any office. I retired for that reason."
—Board member, Michigan

If you're like many board members today, you will leave for one of three reasons:

- Being a board member takes too much time.
- Dealing with state and federal government agencies is a hassle you can do without.
- Your interest has ebbed because your children are no longer in the schools.

Of course, there are many other reasons and combinations of reasons why board members leave, such as declining board authority, unionization and negotiations, abuse, and poor relationships with board colleagues. A few board members resign their positions because they get other political appointments or jobs in the district, or because they develop a close personal relationship with another board member or school employee.

If you've been on the board for some time, you might quit because you feel that you've accomplished what you can, or because you think it's time for some new blood on the board. One retiring New York board member explains his feelings: "At the end, I felt that I was a broken record. Those things which I was going to influence, I al-

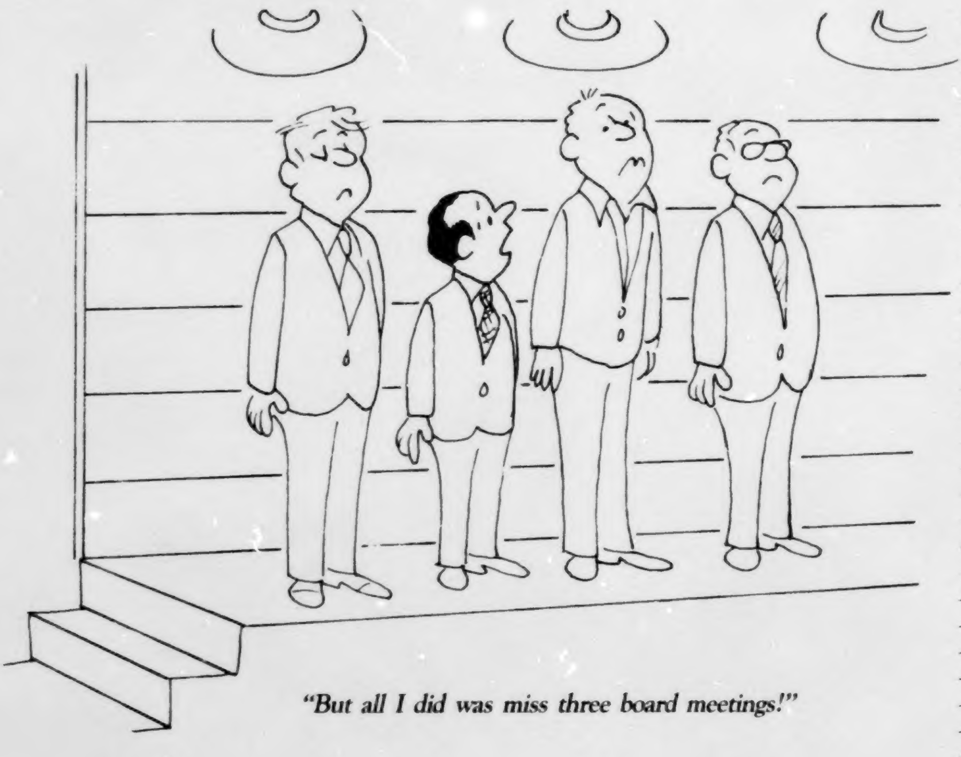
YOU CAN GET REMOVED FROM OFFICE, IF...

Just as your state legislature has the power to provide for your election or appointment as a board member, it also has the power to remove you from office, or to delegate its power to do so.

In most states, the power to remove school board members from office is lodged with a court or with some other public agency, such as the state board of education. In some states, board members can be removed by the electorate in a recall election. Usually, it takes about 20 percent of all the voters, or 35 percent of those who cast votes when the board member was elected, to sign a petition before a recall election can be held.

Each state has specific statutes which specify the reasons for which board members can be removed (you'll want to check yours), but the following reasons are the most common:

- Failing to attend three or four consecutive regular meetings without having reasonable cause, such as illness.
- Conviction of a felony or of any offense involving a violation of official duties.
- Ceasing to reside within the district.
- Becoming physically or mentally incapacitated due to disease, illness, or accident to the degree that the board member will not be able to perform the duties of office.
- Willful violation or neglect of duty, or for willfully disobeying any decision, order, or regulation of the state.



"But all I did was miss three board meetings!"

"My second child had only one year of school left and my term would have been for another four years. My philosophy had been that a board member's judgment should be tempered by having a child in school, and I could already find myself asking, 'Would you vote this way if Jim were going to be in school for another year?'" —Board member, Pennsylvania

ready had. The things which the other board members did not find acceptable, they had heard me talk about so often that they turned it and me off. I had the feeling that their attitude was—'Well, there he goes again.' I felt that if a new voice came along saying the same thing that I was saying, that it might be heard."

How long is too long?

Just how long should people serve on school boards? One board member who quit believes: "Our form of government can't be truly representative if our elected officials become entrenched. They become a part of the problem instead of problem solvers. We need fresh, frequent, representative input if we want to prevent our educational system from becoming atrophied. What better place to start than with me?"

On the other side of the coin, board members who have served 10 or more years feel their experience is not only invaluable, but irreplaceable. "If nothing else, I'm good for historical purposes," said one 15-year veteran. "I can tell the board why a program didn't work in the past or what issues were involved in some of the major decisions." Too, having veterans on the board helps because these people usually have developed an understanding of how the board structure fits in with the larger education establishment.

"Experienced board members know more because they've been around longer. You've got to think they must be doing something right to have lasted so many years." —Board member, Louisiana

Just be sure

Regardless of what your reasons are for bidding *adieu,* or of what you *think* your reasons are, don't quit unless you're absolutely sure that's what you want to do. *Do* take time to think it over. Don't quit in a huff, if you can help it.

In an interview, one board member compared quitting board service to attempting to commit suicide: "You want to quit because you get in the middle of things and you lose your perspective. You dwell on the negative things and just want to throw up your hands. But if you go through several of these traumatic experiences without quitting, you are happy you didn't—things get better, more interesting, and more exciting. Your former experiences help you achieve the perspective you need, and you have an even greater chance of being as effective on the board as you had wanted to be."

If you relinquish your board seat before you have had your fill, you may regret it. You could miss your involvement. Board members often experience a complete cut off when they leave office. There usually is no contact from the district or board. One board member described the empty feeling he got when he picked up a newspaper shortly after quitting and realized he knew nothing about what was going on behind the scenes.

Another board member who resigned and then came back two terms later said: "You really miss it when you quit. There's a void that other activities can't fill."

How to quit

Once you've made up your mind you *will* quit, do it in style. If you have to leave in the middle of a term, you and your board must take certain steps to vacate your office, depending on your state law.

Usually, you will need to tender your resignation in writing (stating the reason), and the board will consider and accept it at their next regular meeting. The board will then declare your position vacant, unless your resignation is withdrawn prior to board action.

When they resign, most board members announce the true reasons for leaving. However, when the true reasons might hurt the ability of the remaining board members to do their jobs, or might further stir up an already stirred-up community, many board members keep their silence. "I cited health and personal reasons," says one ex-board member. "Those were the true reasons, but I didn't explain that the personal matters had to do with certain members of the school board itself!" Another former board member adds, "I felt it would be difficult to get district levies passed if the electorate was informed about the situation to which I objected."

So if you're leaving mad and frustrated, before speaking of your anguish, examine what effects what you say might have on the district.

One last point: When vacating a seat to which you were elected, you might try to encourage someone competent to fill your post. Even if you're leaving disgruntled, with time you will likely look back on your board service as time and effort spent for a good cause. It is likely that another person also will find serving on behalf of public education a rewarding experience.

"I simply felt it was too much hassle when the entire community gets so riled up without knowing the facts. I donated my time for the betterment of the community; not to have eggs covering my car." —Board member, Montana

"School trusteeship should reflect a commitment to education as a high priority of one's life. When your priorities change and you want to do other things, you should get out. That's what I did." —Board member, California

GLOSSARY

A.C.T. (American College Test) A battery of tests designed to measure both achievement and ability; created and administered to groups of students by the American College Testing Program.

Ability grouping Grouping students for instructional purposes according to similar levels of "ability."

Ability test/aptitude test A measurement device used two ways: by schools to assess the general ability of students and sometimes to place them in ability groups; and by college admissions offices to predict how well students are likely to do, and to make admission decisions.

Academic subjects Literary or general subjects rather than practical or vocational ones.

Accountability Being responsible to someone for something. In education, being accountable for learning rather than teaching. Having the responsibility and capability to account for the expenditure of money and the commitment of other resources in terms of the results achieved.

Accounts In school budgeting and finance, the category of revenue or expenditure within a fund for various functions or activities.

Accrual basis accounting Transactions are recorded when they have been reduced to a legal or contractual right or obligation to receive or pay out cash or other resources.

Achievement grouping Grouping students for instruction based upon similar or comparable levels of past performance.

Activity fund The fund containing monies received and distributed for certain activities within the school district, such as PTA funds, candy sales, club or class treasuries.

Ad hoc Established for a particular purpose without reference to wider or permanent applications, such as *ad hoc* committees, or *ad hoc* policy.

Administrative law That part of public law which regulates the conduct of executive branch agencies and governs the rights of individuals in their dealings with those governmental agencies; the body of law created by government agency orders, rules, and regulations.

Administrative order A decision issued by an administrative agency or officer to interpret or apply the provisions of the statutes and regulations administered by the agency. Properly issued, these orders have the full force of law.

Administration rule/regulation Directive prepared by the school administration that sets forth the mechanics for implementing board policy. Tells how, by whom, where, and when things are to be done.

Ad valorem tax Tax levied by a governing body on the assessed value of the personal or real property located within its jurisdiction.

Amendment Subsequent legislation to alter, repeal, or add to all or part of an existing law.

Anticipation warrants A warrant issued to receive money in advance of receipt of tax money. All such warrants must be retired (paid back) with the first tax revenue that is received.

Appeal In a legislative body or assembly, a formal question as to the correctness of a ruling by a presiding officer. In a judicial or administrative adjudication process, the review of a decision by a higher authority which can uphold (affirm), overrule (reverse), or modify that decision.

Appointment Under certain state and federal programs, the process of allocating appropriated funds equitably among jurisdictions in accordance with specified portions or allotments based on criteria such as population, per capita income, or the relative prevalence of the problems intended to be solved.

Appropriation, line item Authorization granted by a governing body to make expenditures and to incur obligations for a specific purpose (such as salaries or utilities), which appears on a line of the budget just the way it is paid out.

Arbitration Method of settling employment disputes through recourse to an impartial third party, whose decision may be final (binding) or may be a recommendation (advisory).

Assessment ratio Rate applied to the assessed value of property for purposes of determining the amount of tax to be levied.

$$\frac{\text{Assessed valuation}}{\text{True market value}} = \text{Assessment ratio}$$

Average Daily Attendance (A.D.A.) Total number of days pupils attend classes in a school district during a reporting period, divided by the number of days school is actually in session during that period.

Audit Formal examination and verification of financial accounts. May also refer to a program examination and verification of results.

Barrier-free Elimination of architectural barriers in educational facilities to allow handicapped persons to easily enter, move about, and use those facilities.

Basic education Traditionally considered to be the "three R's"; however, specific components vary according to local standards.

Bid An offer, usually written, to furnish materials or services for a specified sum of money in accordance with the terms of a contract or proposal.

Bill Form or draft of a proposed law presented to a legislature.

Bond Written promise, generally under seal, to pay a specified sum of money (face value) at a fixed time in the future (date of maturity) and carrying interest at a fixed rate, usually payable periodically; often used by school districts to raise construction money.

Budget, appropriation A budget, characterized by the designation of sums available for specific items of expenditure, the adoption of which automatically authorizes the expenditure listed.

Budget, capital outlay Proposed program for financing construction, additions to facilities, or other permanent improvements; usually contains priorities and a timetable for completion.

Budget, functional A budget which uses the format of the line item or traditional budget to group proposed expenditures first according to general activities or action performed. Examples of functional categories are administration, instruction, pupil personnel services, operation, and maintenance.

Budget, operating or general fund budget A budget which groups proposed expenditures according to certain categories known as the "objects" of the expenditures. On each line of the budget, expenses are listed just the way they are paid out: "Supplies" are one object and "utilities" are another object.

Budget, preliminary Tentative, temporary, or prefatory budget; the one that is temporarily used or followed until the final, approved budget is available.

Bylaws Code or collection of rules adopted by a board or other body for the regulation of its own organization and proceedings; must not conflict with the statute or charter by which the board is created, but may go further into detail to carry out the intent of the statute or charter.

Capital outlay Expenditure which results in the acquisition of fixed assets or additions to fixed assets, such as land, buildings, and fixed equipment.

Career education Organization of the curriculum (K-12) so that a student will receive appropriate information and opportunity for training about or in the world of work; does not necessarily imply attendance at an occupational or skill center.

Cash basis accounting Cash revenues are recorded when cash is actually received and deposited. Cash expenditures are recorded when cash is actually paid out, based on the date of the check.

Cash fund A limited amount of money kept on hand by the schools and administrative offices from which *ad hoc*, day-to-day operating expenditures are made; also called a "petty cash fund."

Certification Process by which a state authorizes a qualified person to teach in the public schools.

Chair Seat occupied by the presiding officer of an assembly, or the occupant of this position; hence the expression, "ruling of the chair."

Class-A lunch School lunch that meets minimum nutritional requirements; government commodities are often supplied free as basic ingredients. Also called "type-A" lunch.

Class load Total number of classes or pupils taught by a teacher.

Co-curricular School-sponsored activities or courses for students in addition to required subjects, such as drama and photography.

Cognitive Term for any process by which a person obtains knowledge of an object; includes conceiving, perceiving, judging, and reasoning.

Collective bargaining The process used by a group of employees and their employers to make offers and counter-offers for the purposes of reaching a mutually acceptable agreement and a written contract incorporating that agreement.

Committee Designated group of persons, or members of an assembly, empowered to examine and report on pending legislation, or to conduct investigations and studies as directed by the parent body.

Committee, advisory Group chosen to prepare recommendations on an educational program; does not have final decision-making power; offers advice to legally constituted administrative officials. Also called "citizen committee" or "citizen commission."

Committee, standing A regularly constituted committee of a board of education (or a similar body), such as a committee of finance or buildings. Members are usually appointed for a definite period of time.

Committee, steering Committee generally representative of the various interests involved and responsible for the overall determination (and sometimes implementation) of policies in connection with a project or activity that is to be undertaken; may function on a national, state, or local level.

Compensatory education Program that seeks to compensate for environmental and experiential deficits in relation to such areas as schooling, housing, employment, poverty, civil rights, and the cultural patterns and life styles of minority groups; attempts to discover and develop the latent potential of the learner with emphasis on experiences, activities, and materials specifically designed for cognitive and motivational growth.

Competency-based education Organized system of teaching and learning to ensure mastery of prescribed skills and behaviors.

Consent calendar One of the agendas of an assembly to which bills considered non-controversial may be referred; if no objection is made during two separate readings, the bill is passed by unanimous consent without debate.

Contractor A person or firm which contracts to furnish supplies or perform work at a certain price or rate.

Continuing education Continuing and lifelong courses of education which offer educational opportunity at any age without the handicap of earlier requirements; may be very basic or at postdoctoral levels.

Corporal punishment Disciplinary action by application of physical force.

Credit hour Quantitative measure of instructional courses.

Critical path Identifies tasks within a project that require longest time periods and managerial attention.

C.R.T. (Criterion Referenced Test) Evaluation instrument used to diagnose the levels of skill achieved on each of several specific tasks applicable to a particular situation in a given classroom or school.

Decibel (db) Unit for measuring the relative intensities or levels of sound. Related to a base, the level in decibels specifically describes sound levels, similar to temperature levels in degrees; refers primarily to sound pressure levels.

De facto segregation Racial separation not directly established by law, but which exists in fact and which is maintained by housing patterns, gerrymandered school district lines, or social class barriers.

Deficit Amount by which a sum of money falls short of the required amount.

Demographic data Information related to the characteristics, student enrollment, or population in a school district.

Diffusion Scattering of light rays so light is emitted or reflected in all directions.

Direct lighting Lighting system in which all or nearly all of the light is distributed downward by a fixture.

Distributive education Training or teaching in selling, display, and marketing procedures.

District/division Refers to the governmental agency of the state created by the state as the instrument through which the legislature carries out its constitutional mandate to provide for a system of public education, unit, elementary, or secondary.

Divisible classroom Classroom that can be divided with interior movable partitions.

Due process (procedural) An orderly, established process for arriving at an impartial and just settlement of a conflict between parties. It entails the elements of notice and fair hearing.

Due process (substantive) Basic legality of legislative enactments such as rules and regulations for students and staff. Must follow basic guidelines of legality, sufficient specificity, reason and sensibleness, adequate dissemination, and appropriate penalties.

Early childhood education Usually refers to the program and curriculum for children in nursery school, kindergarten, or primary grades 1-3.

Educable Capable of learning to a degree that exceeds mere repetition.

Educational policy A judgment derived from some system of values and an assessment of situational factors; operating within institutionalized education as a general plan for guiding decisions regarding means of attaining educational objectives.

Elective Any of a number of nonrequired studies from which a student is allowed to select.

Employee benefits Any value that an employee receives in addition to direct compensation for services rendered, such as retirement benefits, or paid vacations. Also called "fringe benefits."

Enactment, date of The day on which a bill becomes a law.

Entitlements (legislative) Commitments of federal funds in accordance with a formula that requires payments to be made automatically to specified classes of recipients who meet certain criteria of eligibility. Funding for entitlement programs (also called budgetary "uncontrollables") goes through the budgetary/appropriations process, but the level of funding depends on the original legislation rather than on an annual appropriation. The best known entitlement program is Social Security. Note, however, that many programs employing formulas (such as Impact Aid) are subject to annual appropriations.

E.M.R. (Educable Mentally Retarded) A child who is unable to profit to any great extent from the programs of regular schools because of slow mental development, but who has potential for development to a point where he can function independently in the community.

E.T.S. (Educational Testing Service) Nationwide organization which administers various kinds of educational and psychological tests, such as the College Entrance Examination.

Exceptional child One who deviates intellectually, physically, socially, or emotionally in growth and development so markedly from what is considered normal that he cannot receive adequate benefit from a regular school program and requires a special class or supplementary instruction and services.

Executive session/closed session Meetings of the board which by law are not open to the public, usually dealing with personnel matters, negotiations strategy, or legal strategy.

Ex-officio member Usually a member of a school board or similar body by virtue of holding another elective or appointive office; sometimes by virtue of former membership on the board or group; usually a nonvoting member.

Extracurricular Activities of students, teams, or clubs not considered part of the curriculum.

Federal Register A daily publication which contains official notices of agencies in the executive branch of the federal government, including all proposed and final regulations, notices of intended rulemaking, executive orders, reorganization plans, and program deadlines.

Filibuster Delaying tactics employed on the floor of an assembly by a legislator supporting the minority side seeking to block a vote or to compel the majority to modify its legislative program, usually by prolonged speech-making and dilatory motions.

Fine arts Subjects that include drama, dance, speech, music, and art.

Fiscal year Any annual period established for accounting purposes.

Fixed salary schedule An established plan for paying salaries to teachers, supervisors, and administrators according to a definite scale of increases depending on length of service and professional preparation.

Floor Area within each legislative chamber reserved for members, as distinguished from the galleries; an assemblage of the entire body of each house, or quorum thereof, in its chamber for the purpose of doing legislative business.

Formula Under certain state and federal programs, the process of dividing appropriated funds equitably among the jurisdictions in accordance with specified portions based on such criteria as population, per capita income, or the relative prevalence of the problems intended to be solved.

Free time Time during a flexible schedule when students or teachers are not assigned to a class.

Fringe benefits See "employee benefits."

Gifted Students with intellectual ability and mental age well above the norm; refers to upper one to two percent of all students in terms of their I.Q.s (Intelligence Quotients).

Grandfather clause Provision of law exempting certain parties from increased standards of a new law; often used in statutes governing certification, contract, and retirement requirements.

Grant-in-aid Financial grant, frequently paid periodically, made by a government or agency to another government or agency, or to an individual, by way of assistance for a general or special purpose, such as a grant by the federal government or the states for the promotion of vocational education; usually requires a preliminary or matching contribution and the meeting of certain criteria by the grant recipient.

Grievance Complaint by an employee that a provision of the collective bargaining agreement under which he is working has been violated.

Grievance arbitration Final step in a grievance procedure used to determine whether a violation, misapplication, or misinterpretation of an existing agreement has occured; may be either advisory or binding.

Hardware Machines and technical equipment used in presenting audio visual and programmed materials. Also used to refer to computer equipment, as opposed to "software," which means the programs used with computers.

Hearing, legislative Meeting of a legislative committee held to receive oral and written testimony from specialists, government officials, members of Congress, or the public.

Heterogeneous grouping No attempt is made to group students according to ability. Wide ranges of academic ability will be present within the groups.

Homebound instruction Individual teaching in a child's home by an itinerant teacher; for education of the handicapped and for students unable to attend school due to illness or other reasons.

Homogeneous grouping Grouping students for instruction based on one or more common characteristics. Most commonly, homogeneous grouping is on the basis of supposed ability of students—a "tracking" system is developed.

Indirect lighting Lighting system in which all or nearly all of the light is distributed upward toward the ceiling.

Initiative In government, a procedure by which a specified number of voters may propose a statute, constitutional amendment, or ordinance; the general right to present a new legislative bill.

In-service education General term used to describe the efforts to promote the professional growth and development of employees while on the job.

I.Q. (Intelligence Quotient) Scale unit used in reporting test scores measuring intelligence. Based on a ratio between mental age and chronological age.

Intangible property Something which has no intrinsic value, but which represents value, such as copyrights, patents, stocks, bonds, and bank notes.

Interdisciplinary Instructional process which combines information from two or more subjects or creates a team situation that allows teachers with different academic disciplines to plan a teacher-learning program.

Interest grouping Students select a group based on individual interests. Placement in group is the decision of the student, rather than the teacher.

Itinerant teacher One who travels to two or more schools or to homes and hospitals to teach certain pupils. Also called a "circuit teacher" or "homebound teacher."

Job action Concerted action taken by employees, such as a strike or abstinence in whole or in part from the full, faithful, and proper performance of the duties of employment for the purpose of inducing, influencing, or coercing a change in employment conditions.

Job description A written statement of the various operations and duties, equipment, methods, working conditions, responsibilities, and other essential factors concerned in a job; usually based on a job analysis of detailed working conditions, promotional status, employee requirements, and training the employee must possess in order to qualify for employment.

Language arts Refers to the subjects of reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Language laboratory Specialized instructional area usually containing audio (or audio and visual) equipment at student stations; often includes provision for individual, two-way communication between the teacher and student.

Leader, majority In government, the party member who directs the activities of the majority party on the floor of either the Senate or the House.

Leader, minority In government, the party member who directs the activities of the minority party on the floor of either the Senate or the House.

Learning disabilities One or more deficiencies exhibited by a child in the essential learning processes of perception, conceptualization, language, memory, attention, impulse control, or motor function.

Learning resource center A specially designed space containing a wide range of supplies and equipment for the use of individual pupils or small groups pursuing independent study. Frequently provided are library books; a variety of audio-visual equipment and supplies; maps; models; and spaces to study, preview films, and hold meetings.

Lesson plan A teaching outline of the important points of a lesson arranged in the order in which they are to be presented; may include objectives, points to be made, questions to ask, references to materials, assignments, and evaluation methods or tools.

License Grant by the state to individuals to practice an occupation or profession after successfully meeting regulations, taking an exam, or completing required courses.

Linguistics Study of human speech and the nature and structure of language.

Mainstreaming Moving handicapped children from their segregated status in special education classes and integrating them with "normal" children in regular classrooms.

M.B.O. (Management By Objectives) A systematic management approach whereby administrators and their subordinates agree upon and meet specific goals and objectives.

M & O (Maintenance and Operations) A category some states use for funding education. Money appropriated for M & O may be used at the local school board's discretion, for anything from floor mops to teacher salaries.

Magnet school Comprehensive school in a metropolitan area that offers enriched curriculum in one or more subjects.

Master plan Process of planning for an entire school district; includes grade-enrollment projections and determination of needed facilities.

Master teacher One who possesses considerable skill in teaching; selected to serve as a supervising teacher or leader of a team when team teaching occurs.

Matching funds (legislative) A program of financial support in which the federal government creates an incentive for the development of needed programs on the state or local level by offering to "match" state or local funds allocated for the same purpose.

Mediation Informal attempt by a third party to help in the settlement of an employment dispute through advice or other suggestions, but without specific public recommendations for settlements.

Merit rating Recognized individual differences in instructional ability; strongly resisted by many teachers due to the difficulty of developing an acceptably objective method for evaluating teacher performance; usually tied to salary increases.

Microfiche A process of photo reduction that allows a large number of pages to be recorded on a small sheet of material.

Microfilm A process of photo reduction that allows a large number of pages to be recorded on small rolls of film.

M.R. (Mentally Retarded) Student who learns at a slower than normal rate.

Multi-media Use of several kinds of media in instructional presentations, such as some combination of slides, movies, tapes, records, or television.

Nepotism Favoritism shown to relatives; bestowal of patronage by reason of relationship rather than of merit. (Many states have statutes forbidding nepotism in the employment of teachers, the provisions of which vary greatly, and enforcement of which is thought to be lax, though the courts construe them strictly when cases are brought before them.)

Open building system One whose components are interchangeable with components of other systems or with conventional components, with little or no modification.

Paraprofessional Non-certified individual who assists teachers in non-teaching tasks, such as clerical work. Also called a "teacher aide" or "classroom aide."

Parent-teacher conference Discussions among an individual student's parents and teachers, usually on an organized school-wide basis, to discuss the progress of the child.

Percentile Statistical term; child ranking in the 99th percentile on a test indicates that, of all persons tested, only one percent scored higher.

Performance contracting An agreement through which a school may enter into a contract with a private company to carry on a part of or the total education program of the school. The company agrees to produce to certain standards and the school does not pay the fee for children whose achievement does not measure up to the level stated in the contract.

Petition Formal written request submitted to the legislature by a citizen group or other organization, asking for the consideration of some topic or policy, or favorable action on a piece of legislation.

Phonics Learning the sounds of letters or groups of letters and building words from them.

Physical plant The land, buildings, and improvements of campuses, athletic fields, and other plots used for the activities of a university, college, or school; includes buildings for instruction and administration, libraries, gymnasiums, dormitories, power plants, and other buildings, as well as the equipment and furniture in the buildings.

Plurality The margin by which the vote received by the leading candidate exceeds the vote for the next highest candidate, in a field of three or more candidates; may be sufficient to carry an election, but may be less than a majority.

Policy Statement adopted by a school board or an administrative agency outlining principles to be followed with respect to specific matters; usually requires rules or regulations to be formulated for its implementation, and is broad enough to provide for administrative decisions regarding the manner in which it shall be implemented, although its implementation in some manner is mandatory. See "administrative rule."

P.P.B.S. (Planning, Programming, Budgeting System)
Method for studying alternative educational plans and choosing the most efficient; includes the following steps: measurable objectives are stated, priorities are assigned, alternate plans to meet objectives are determined, dollar costs for each plan are estimated, a plan is selected and used, results are evaluated, objectives are reviewed, and there is a continuous search for more effective and efficient alternatives.

Preliminary drawings Second phase of drawings developed by an architect that indicate specific space relationships. See "schematic designs."

Pre-school education Theory and method for guiding very young children in a group, generally refers to education demonstrated in nursery schools; emphasis is placed on developing capacities of the individual and on helping him to meet his problems.

Programmed instruction Educational materials such as texts, teaching machines, and audiovisual aids, arranged in logical sequence. A student may, individually or in groups, progress at his own rate; his learning is reinforced by immediate awareness that he is accurate, or that he is inaccurate and needs help.

Public Law 94-142 A federal law that ensures access to public educational opportunities to handicapped persons, ages 3-21.

Pupil personnel services Services provided to students in the areas of guidance and counseling, psychological, social work, and health needs.

Pupil-teacher ratio Average number of pupils per teacher in a system or school.

Psycho-motor skills Those developed by individuals which relate to their physical coordination in the performance of prescribed tasks, such as typing, drafting, and running.

Quartile One-quarter range of percentiles; student with a test placement of 75 or better would be in the first quartile.

Quorum Minimum number of members required to be present for action to be taken in a legislative body or governing body.

R & D (Research and Development) The study of industrial-technical problems, including provisions for individual or group investigations of problems and opportunities to evaluate their solutions by designing, constructing, and testing projects.

Reading readiness Refers to a child's intellectual and physical ability to learn to read.

Real property Land and the structures built on land.

Recall Procedure by which the qualified electors of a given district may remove from office those officials who have been elected by the electors of the same district.

Referendum Principle or practice of referring measures proposed or passed by a legislative body to the vote of the electorate for approval or rejection.

Remedial Procedure used to teach students whose performance is judged to be below normal in a given subject.

Resolution Formal expression of opinion or intention usually made *after* voting by a formal organization, a legislature, club, or other group.

Revocation, certificate of Official retraction of a teaching license for violation of law or established regulations of the issuing body.

S.A.T. (Scholastic Aptitude Test) An instrument used to measure ability, administered by the College Entrance Examination Board to students in grades 11 or 12; used as a criterion for college and university admission.

Sabbatical/sabbatical teaching year A plan for providing teachers with an opportunity for self-improvement through a leave of absence with full or partial compensation following a designated number of consecutive years of service.

Schematic designs or drawings Plans developed by an architect in the process of designing a school.

Sequence A set of elements, numbers, terms, or courses that are ordered in a logical progression, such as in increasing magnitude; hence, "sequential" learning.

Single-loaded corridor Hallway that has classrooms feeding in from only one side; opposite of "double-loaded corridor."

Sinking fund Money which has been set aside or invested for a definite purpose of meeting payments on debt at some future time.

Site (construction) Area or plot of ground on which anything has been or is to be located.

Social promotion Moving a student to the next higher grade level, even if he has not attained the expected level of academic achievement.

Social studies Combination of the courses of study in history, geography, economics, sociology, and political science.

Software All non-hardware elements of a computer-based system, including written computer programs, flow charts, and other items related to information systems.

Sound absorption Reduction in reflection of sounds to minimize the unwanted noise of sound reverberation.

Sponsor (legislative) A legislator who submits a bill to the legislature or who joins a group of legislators in supporting and submitting a bill.

Standardized test Evaluation instrument given under similar, controlled circumstances to many individuals.

Student teacher College student assigned through a teacher education program to a school to observe and to do directed teaching under the supervision of a certified teacher.

Supplementary reader Auxiliary book used with a basic text to teach reading.

Suspension, teacher Temporary severance of a teacher from his position by the employer; used occasionally as a disciplinary measure and also as an expedient while charges are being prepared against the teacher.

Support staff Employees who provide administrative, technical, and logistical support to a school or educational program.

Systems analysis Process of identifying goals, considering all facts and resources in alternative approaches, and giving serious thought to the relation between input and output.

Tangible property That which has physical existence, an intrinsic value, such as real estate or automobiles.

Tax base Assessed valuation of real estate which a school district may tax for yearly operational monies.

Tax levy The resolution of the board indicating the amount of money needed to be raised by tax for the several funds of the school district.

Tax rate The amount of tax paid for each increment (usually $100) of assessed value of property.

Teacher aide Non-certified adult employed on a full or part-time basis to assist a teacher or teaching team in a number of tasks, such as clerical.

Team leader Organizational designation for the teacher assigned or selected by peers to organize and administer a team teaching program.

Team teaching Two or more teachers cooperatively planning, teaching, and evaluating the progress of their students.

Tenure Guaranteed job security, usually granted to teachers after a specified number of years of satisfactory service; cannot be rescinded except for specified reasons.

Time sharing Use of a single computer by several agencies.

Tort Any negligent or willful act of school officers or employees by which pupils or other innocent persons are wrongfully injured or damaged.

T.M.R. (Trainable Mentally Retarded) A child incapable of achieving any significant proficiency in academic skills, but who is capable of profiting from programs of training in self-care and in social and simple job or vocational skills.

Transcript Official copy of a student's academic record; official copy of the verbatim proceedings of a meeting or hearing.

Vocational education Courses that prepare a student to obtain immediate employment in areas, such as printing or computer programming.

Valuation, assessed Recorded value of property on tax roles. Usually a percentage of market value.

Value, true The price at which a given piece of property could be sold at the present time under actual sale conditions. (Not a precise term. In common usage, it means market value as distinguished from a value shown by books or records.)

Valuation, state equalized Valuation of real property where state control is exercised to ensure that the rate of assessment is consistent throughout the state.

Voucher Document which authorizes the payment of money and usually indicates the account and code number to be charged.

Voucher plan A plan to distribute educational monies through issuance to parents directly of a voucher allocating public funds to pay the cost of their children's education in either a public or a private school of their choice.

Worker's compensation Payments made to an employee by his employer for an injury; not necessarily an injury arising out of the duties related to the employment, but occuring during working hours.

Yard duty The responsibility to supervise children on the playground during recess, or before or after school.

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APPENDIX

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